Sevens
V15 - I Wonder Who You'll Resemble, Fifteenth Generation.

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Prologue

… It was on the throne.

In that place where only the king was permitted to sit, Celes made herself at home, as she rested her legs on the back of a kneeling Remis.

The one who entered the scene adorned himself with the armor of a knight who once stood against Celes, having made it his own, and with his black hair grown longer than before; a young knight with his hair parted in a three-to-seven ration:【Breid Vamper】.

In the past, he was lover of the Circry Viscount House (Currently Baron House)'s Doris, but at present, he was of Celes' Royal Guards, looking at Celes alone.

Having accomplished the promotion he desired, he was charged with thirty thousand of the soldiers stationed in Centralle.

"Celes-sama, I, Breid, shall set off for Beim, the land that besmirched you, with thirty thousand elity soldiers. Please await good news."

Before setting off, he showed off his prided armor, and reporting to Celes, he thought he could make her look his way.

But near her holding a large platter, Rufus… the crown prince was feeding her fruit.

With a pose that indicated she was mildly in thought. Her mouth moved to chew, and around were men whose faces turned red with that gesture alone. Wearing dangerously exposing clothes mismatched to the room, those men that surrounded her…

They were all beautiful, and they all loved her. No, they were her prisoners. Giving up their once wives and lovers, at the moment, they were Celes' toys.

"Beim? Oh right, come to think of it, I did say something like that. These days, the number of nobles with the disposition to rebel has gone down, so it's grown boring. But moving all the way to Beim is a pain, so… yeah, Breid, I'll leave it to you."

"Yes! Even if it costs me my life, I shall eradicate all humans of Beim without fail!"

As he said he'd use their lives to redeem the sin of insulting Celes, the royal guard's morale was quite high. Yet it was a group whose lives had already been thrown away to her charm.

Celes seemed uninterested.

"If you find anything interesting, bring some back, kay? Today, one of the hostage men I'd always been interested in finally bent to me. So I'd like to return to the inner palace already, you know."

Breid hurriedly apologized.

"M-my deepest apologies! I shall depart at once."

Celes simply giggled to herself.

"Wait. Come to think of it, that piece of trash is in Beim. Breid, bring that 'medicine' with you on your travels. When nothing else works, make use of it."

That medicine… it was brought from Zayin, and with repeated human experimentation in Bahnseim, it was a medicine to unite man and monsters.

On those words, Breid experienced a fright.

"B-but Celes-sama, there's no need to go that…"

Celes stood herself up on Remis, and looked down on Breid from a high place.

"Who asked you to talk back? This time's isn't a medicine that will kill

you at once. And weren't you to risk your life for me?"

On those words, the surroundings showered malice on Breid. Those countless sharp glares continued falling down on him.

"P-perish the thought! I merely wanted to answer to your expectations before a need for such a medicine arose! All of me is yours, Celes-sama. If you order it, I shall fulfill any mission for you!"

As he gave a forced excuse, Celes showed a smile. She had immediately seen through that it was a lie. A face that understood Breid simply didn't want to end up in a pitiful state.

A cold sweat flowed down Breid's back.

"Very well. I'll forgive it. In exchange, you will work to the bone for me."

As she said that, she stepped down from Remis, and returned to the inner palace so early in the morning. The men around her. And crown prince Rufus followed behind.

After feeling relief, Breid thought in his heart.

(It's the chance I've finally grasped. I want to serve under Celes-sama for all eternity. I don't want to use something that would make me such a thoughtless monster. Now then, if that's how it's going to be, I need some achievements in Beim. And voila, perfect timing. There's that man in Beim… Lyle, you're going to be dying for me. I'll present your head to her, and I'll enter her inner palace. Then as a man, and as a vassal, Celes-sama will finally look at me.)

His sense of values warped, Breid swore in his heart to get hands on the head of Lyle, who'd clearly shown their gap in ability last they'd met…

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… Bahnseim's frontmost line.

In that place where a neighboring country once stood, Blois Cadel

looked over the armies that arrived one after the next.

Large scale forces of thousands. Small forces of dozens.

An extensive gathering of nobles from knight to duke had gathered.

Blois looked at that army, and let out a sigh.

“When we were so short staffed here, they had this many men to spare, I see.”

Alongside his adjutant knight, they looked out at the gathering armies from the office the country’s king once used.

“Preparations to receive them has greatly derailed our schedule though.”

Blois laughed.

“Exactly. We were prepared to take a few ten thousand, and gathering the documents for those anti-Beim strategy meetings was hell. Now then, if another problem were to pop up, it would have to be…”

The adjutant nodded with a serious look on his face.

“It would have to be the royal guards and elites coming from Centralle. It’s true they have achieved results, but I’ve only ever heard bad rumor about them. That they massacre by choice, and such. They aren’t giving the slightest thought to postwar rule.”

Blois returned to the desk, and took some documents in hand.

“Breid Vamper. Born to a knight house without any heritage. Raising his status with military exploits, he became an official knight, and went right into the royal guard. Looking at his history alone, he’s splendid. The knight he defeated was a noted name in Bahnseim, and all.”

His adjutant knight made an unsatisfied expression.

“It seems he participated in that Gryphon Subjugation unit. He may be an acquaintance of the Walt House’s eldest son in Beim. Should we proceed with caution?”

On those words, Blois shook his head. The adjutant knight had never see Celes in close proximity. Some part of him was making light of her.

“That’s not happening. He’s a man who got as far as her royal guard. I’m sure he’s madly in lover with Celes-sama. Of course, the problem is how he’s never properly commanded a squadron before. Yet despite that, he was granted thirty thousand, and this large-scale war is his first real war. It would be nice if he doesn’t intrude.”

Blois half-expected him to throw the battlefield into disorder.

Before the black lines of troops before them, the two men predicted just how terrible the impending invasion of Beim would become.

Blois spoke…

“I’d like to keep casualties as low as possibly, you know. Though I know there’s no way in hell that’s happening.”

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Having headed to Faunbeux to request cooperation, we used a sea route through Cartaffs, and returned to South Beim.

Arriving with Vera Trēs on a fully loaded Vera Trēs, we met up with Novem’s unit that had arrived beforehand, and with Adele-san’s group.

With her pink hair in a ponytail, Lianne was wearing clothes easy to move in. With a travel case stuffed with goods she had gotten together in Cartaffs, she descended the gangplank.

Her appearance didn’t look like a princess’, but she did have the atmosphere.

“So this is South Beim. I’d heard of it, but it’s quite developed. Quite a few ships anchored, and plenty of goods moving around the port.”

She was giggling. I was aware the contents of her luggage all pertained to war.

After Bahnseim declared war on Beim, South Beim had started preparing in a great rush.

When Novem approached us, Miranda waved her hand at me. And she looked at Shannon, who'd disembarked with us.

"Shannon, you didn't cause them any trouble, did you?"

To Miranda's smile, Shannon averted her eyes.

"O-of course not. How many pinches do you think my quick wit saved us from? Lyle was the one dragging us through hell."

I won't argue with that. The pink haired demon smiling beside us strangling my neck with that bloodcurdling expression on her face was the biggest pinch we went through.

But the one who saved us wasn't Shannon, but Parselena-san the hostage.

Seeing Shannon sending eyes looking for some backup around, Clara dismounted, and decided to nod.

But Miranda sensed it was just for show.

"So you did trouble them? Well, not like I didn't see it coming."

"… I did my best."

Lending an ear to the sibling conversation, I received Novem's report. I had gained the information through Monica, but I still wanted to verify it.

No, perhaps I just wanted to talk with Novem.

"Any new info?"

"None. Beim still seems to believe it can do something by itself. Like reinforcing Fortress Redant, with Beim's residents joining in, they've gathered a force that exceeds a hundred thousand and such… that sort of talk has drifted in."

Surrounding countries were hesitant to assist Beim.

Beim had cut me off. That action alone had dragged those surrounding lands into the situation, driving Beim into a corner.

I looked at Novem.

“I do hope Beim does it’s best. I really need them to persist as much as they can.”

Novem nodded.

“Everything is going as you anticipated. After this, if our devices work well, it should bring about the expected result.”

Novem seemed to think the plan I… no, me, the ancestors in the Jewel and Milleia-san had thought out would definitely work.

And I spoke to Novem.

“Hey, Novem.”

“Yes?”

Seeing her face as she waited for my words, I swallowed them down. ‘Do you love me? Leaving out the Walt in my name, I mean.’ Seeing myself about to say that, I felt a little ashamed.

Dammit, I wasn’t getting anywhere.

What’s more, it wasn’t something to discuss in a place like this.

“No, it’s nothing. Since we’ve all just returned, let’s rest a bit. And this is Lianne-san. Though you’ve already met before.”

Lianne gave Novem her greetings.

“It’s a pleasure, Novem-san. As my senior, I hope you’ll bring my up to speed. I couldn’t help but put Ludmilla-san of Cartaffs on guard, and we weren’t able to talk about much. But I do hope we get along.”

Novem smiled at Leanne.

“It’s a pleasure. Let’s get along, Lianne-sama.”

“Lianne is fine.”

“Then you can call me Novem in kind.”

Their smiling exchange, to the uninitiated onlooker, it may have looked pleasant. By why is it, I wonder… it looked as if they were putting checks and balances on one another. I’m sure I’m just tired. No doubt about it.

Must be because all I’d seen in the Jewel was the Fifth’s threatening, and the Sixth’s failures.

Shaking my head, I looked between Novem, and the other side of me, with Aria, Clara, and Miranda and Shannon.

And Shannon spoke.

“It’s amazing. Their Mana is violently clashing. Novem is redirecting it to the side, but that Lianne princess is going on an amazing offense.”

Miranda looked at Lianne.

“A troublesome foe. I can’t think I’ll lose, but taking her on will break my bones.”

Looking at Miranda as she said such a thing, Aria looked fed up.

“Can’t we all just… get along a bit? Rather, why do I have to be so mindful among allies?”

Clara addressed her.

“You’re mistaken, Aria-san. It’s precisely because we’re allies, that we have to be so mindful. It’s the same within family.”

As we had such a conversation at the port, Vera and Monica descended the ramp.

“Huh? You’re still here? I recommend you go back and rest soon. Once it gets busy, you won’t be getting any proper rest, I’m sure.”

Experiencing a worried Vera’s kindness, I reassured myself Novem and Lianne were definitely not carrying out politics.

… Beim.

Manning the receptions desk, Tanya pushed her hair back behind her ear.

Managing her usual desk as her other face… her Sweeper face felt how quiet the guild had been as of late.

Feeling a little lonesome at the east branch's situation where there were still just as many troublemakers around, she let out a light sigh.

After Lyle's party had left Beim, they had grown considerably busy. And the atmosphere in Beim was becoming more inclined towards war by the day. At this point, many adventurers had been requested for city defense, and stationed long-term.

Because of that, there were less adventurers returning to the guild after a successful day's work.

Tanya felt it was the calm before the storm.

"If only it ends without anything too great."

Lyle's actions, and the large country of Bahnseim.

As all of them tried to swallow Beim up, Tanya felt it all tightening…

Corps of Iron Pipes

… The Beim invasion force of close to three hundred thousand before them, the main members gathered to hold a meeting.

There were nobles exceeding Baron Class joining in, and generals and knight brigade chiefs sent from the center. On top of that, Breid of Celes' royal guard joined in on the meeting.

And as expected, the meeting's topic of discussion concentrated on Redant Fortress. If they avoided breaching it, the march alone would bring out victims. Rather than sending in a fragmented number to put out casualties, they wanted to breach the fortress and proceed straight to Beim, or so was the general consensus of those discussing.

Dragged into it with his force of five thousand, Blois listened to the discussions, as he thought over this time's march on Beim.

(Now then, the main members are almost all folks that worship Celes, and the most troublesome would have to be that head of the royal guards, eh?)

Royal Guard. It was something Celes had arbitrarily gathered in Centralle from those that yearned for her, and stuck a name on. It's not as if they had any particular job, and they merely tried to stay by her side. While they fell short of the handsome men that surrounded her, they were a group that was as if they were grouped from the make of their faces.

Among them, Breid was the one with actual achievements, so he was considered the leader.

He had participated in suppressing a number of civil uprisings, and with those merits, they didn't have any particular complaints. No,

even if they did, no one voiced them. Because it was something Celes had decided.

However, that Breid was now leading thirty thousand men, and participating in the invasion of Beim. A considerable authority… with the backing of Celes' royal guard, it was quite a large force within the current Bahnseim.

As Breid put out more opinions than necessary at the conference, Blois was disconcerted.

"I believe it best we have another force cross the mountains, and circle around back for a pincer attack."

If a pincer was possible, someone would have said that from the start.

(It's because that's impossible that we're conquering them head on, is what we're trying to say. Even if we did traverse those mountains, just how much casualties would come out… and just how much time do you think that would take?)

Lacking in experience leading a unit, and Breid was the type to put himself in the front of the front. It would be a saving grace if he had the ability to back it up, but unfortunately, the problem lay in his lack of it.

The other generals and knight chiefs and Lords upon hearing his opinion.

"A wonderful proposition. But we have not the equipment to scale mountains. Even if we wished to volunteer for the task, we are insufficient."
"I am the same. I wonder just many forces are there among us with enough training to accomplish such a feat? As expected of Centralle's elites."
"Then why not Breid-dono cross the mountains and circle around back? The rest of us will be attacking head on as planned, mind you."

Being handled so lightly, Breid's expression changed. He directed a glare around.

(With the numbers we have, if we clash head on, we'll win quite plainly. Or rather, Breid-dono seems to favor scheming a bit. It's quite hard for a small force to break through so many. Does he understand that…)

Generally, battles were of numbers. At times, there were existences that could overturn a difference in number, and such existences were weak to underhanded means, or so was Blois' opinion. By the strength of their power, they couldn't help but find conceit most of the time.

Breid hit the table to gather everyone's eyes.

"Very well. Centralle's elite force shall circle around the back for you. You all need only put out your mountains of casualties as you fixate on your frontal assault!"

Blois looked at Breid, as he touched a hand to his chin.

(I heard he had achievements in the Gryphon extermination, but does that mean the commander was a talented one? I believe they had a commander called Norma or something… but by rumor, you can't call her anything great. As I thought, that boy of the Walt House was involved.)

The force that accomplished a task as large as taking down a Gryphon. There was a time when that had caused a bit of a panic at the palace.

Even now, Blois could remember that time, and with Breid on his mind, he had investigated it again. But by the merits he had been given, it couldn't help but seem the man was lacking in ability.

(It's not like his military prowess is anything special. No, by the documents, he's supposed to be a relatively proficient knight, but…)

With Lyle conceding the achievements, and by landing the finishing blow on a knight mainly defeated by Celes, Breid had earned himself quite a high evaluation.

(This is more troublesome than I thought.)

Blois thought, as he listened in on the continuation of the conference…

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… Fortress Redant.

In it, adventurers and soldiers of Beim. And with a means of gathering volunteer soldiers from its residents- a means Beim had never used before- troops exceeding fifty thousand had gathered.

The reinforced fortress had reduced the three layers of walls it once had to two. But they were more outfitted than before, and their strength and function had been sufficiently enhanced.

To continue employing fifty thousand would be difficult, but even so, it was more than possible temporarily.

And Beim seemed relieved at the number of soldiers at the fortress.

“The fortress has grown stronger than before, with more troops to boot. It’s taken down an even larger force of monsters before. We’ll be the victors this time.”
“If there’s anything to be frustrated over, it’s that the previous situation was so harsh that even if we win here, it would be hard to get any evaluation, I guess?”
“Reinforcements will be coming from the city. Once we turn Bahnseim back here, it will be the end. Though it would be nice if they concentrated more on this point rather than the city.”

The volunteer soldiers equipped armaments made by Beim’s craftsmen. However, by those craftsmen… the various stores put to work, their outfits were all over the place, and their weapons weren’t uniform.

They gave off the impression of a gathering of mercenaries.

Observing them was Rauno, dressed in equipment he had found inside the fortress. Their guard was too lax, and their soldiers lacked tension or consistency, so he was easily able to slip inside.

As he sat atop a wooden crate, he drank with unfamiliar soldiers as he gathered information.

“Hmm, so is any information coming in from Bahnseim?”

To Rauno’s surprise, one of the soldier’s ale-reddened face turned, and made fun of him.

“You don’t even know something so basic? They’ve got mercs on their side. Friends, and the ones with debt to Beim are passing on info. For that army of Bahnseim, it’ll all be over once they flee before the miracle of Redant Fortress!”

The miracle of Redant Fortress… It was the heroic tale of Lyle annihilating an army of several hundreds of thousands of monsters, spread and embellished by minstrels.

Rauno sent a glance around to make sure no one noticed him. Taking some small sips of his drink, he took in surrounding movements.

(… They’re considerably in for it. It may be the case this fortress gets breached faster than expected. With that Bahnseim lot bringing so large a force, I’m amazed they can forget to lay the groundwork to such an extent.)

From Cartaffs to Bahnseim’s north and the east, he had gathered information, and having infiltrated the fortress, Rauno was set to gather information there before returning to South Beim.

(Their equipment is in order, but their atmosphere and the command line are screwed. This is going just as Lyle’s party anticipated.)

Even Beim had soldiers. But it’s not as if they had a chance for proper training. The volunteer soldiers were the sorts that had only ever gone out to the surrounding villages and defeated monsters.

Even if their equipment was nice, the contents were low in quality.

To melt into the surroundings, Rauno played the drunkard as he felt a grave sense of danger at the fortress’ lack of it…

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South Beim.

There, I met the heir to the Randbergh House's main branch… a young man called Baldoir Randbergh.

"It has been a while, Lyle-sama."

Pledging loyalty on a knee in knight attire, Baldoir-san… no, Baldoir had met me eight or nine years ago, apparently.

After that, he ventured out from his house for training. On top of that, once he returned, he helped the head, and spent his time on his territory, so he was an individual uncharmed by Celes.

Even with the Sixth's Skill, Baldoir's reaction was displayed in blue.

"Good of you to have come, Baldoir. My apologies, but I'll be putting you to work for my sake."

He stood.

"Leave it to me. Our head has told me to fight for you. And the Randbergh House is a House with a debt to the Walts. You'll certainly see how useful I can be. Order however you will."

I didn't have the memories of meeting him before, and I felt a little bad for not remembering. But to be honest, I was too busy at present to talk about that.

"Hearing that is a relief. In that case, the three hundred fifty troops you brought will come under my direct command. While I do feel sorry, I'll be swapping out their equipment. I'll properly return their original equipment, and you can do as you please with the armor I'm handing out. However, don't sell it off."

In the office of my simple estate in South Beim, Baldoir was a little confused.

"I understand that you're short on troops, but are you certain? If you have the money to pay for the equipment of three hundred fifty men,

should you not hire more?”

I sat in a chair, and faced the desk. I had been processing the mountainous pile of forms on it, and after finishing another of them, I turned my eyes to Baldoir.

“No problem. I’ll procure the troops I lack from the eastern front. And I’ve already gotten the equipment for three thousand together.”

The craftsmen under old Letarta, and the ones that migrated in… on top of the smiths of the four-country alliance and Cartaffs; I had already put in the requests.

I was curious as to how far they’d gotten in my time away, and when I asked around, it seems we had three thousand ready.

“By the way, there’s a weapon I’d like to entrust them a bit. I’d really like to start drilling for those three hundred fifty.”

Baldoir gave a strong nod.

“The Randbergh House has never been negligent in basic training. Whether it be sword or spear or bow, they will handle them well.”

Tough luck. What we assembled wasn’t sword, spear or bow.

“It’s a bit different. Truth be told, I’ll be having them use this.”

I handed a gun to Baldoir.

“Lyle-sama, this is, well… a gun, is it not?”

“Oh, you know of it? That makes matters fast. To be totally honest, outfitting them for your numbers was our limit. We didn’t have the leisure for any more, so it was a huge help. Your men are of high quality, and I can entrust it to them with relief. Now then, shall we get to training at once?”

Baldoir held up the gun in both hands.

“I do know of them, or should I say the previous generation of the Walt House made use of them, so there are a number of guns kept at our house. However… saying there were too many problems to use them, Maizel-sama proceeded in a direction away from utilizing

them…”

There were quite a few problems. It was possible to block them with a simple magic shield. And the biggest problem was money. The training of soldiers who used them required bullets, so money would go right down the drain.

“It’s fine. They’re also Magic Tools engraved with Skills. To add to that… the money is something I’ve borrowed from an acquaintance, so worry not.”

Seeing me avert my eyes, Baldoir looked worried.

Hearing that Baldoir knew of guns, yet that my father had prohibited their use, the Seventh let out a conflicted voice.

『… no matter the time, the average man fails to understand the ones moving forward.』

To him, the Fifth gave a fed-up tone.

『We were able to carry it out because we have the craftsmen of Beim, and a Labyrinth under our wing. Realize we’d never be able to amass such a number originally. On top of how it couldn’t help but cost money, the effect is too questionable. Maizel’s decision was spot on.』

Money wasn’t enough to maintain them. You needed to gather all the consumable rounds, the craftsmen to maintain them, and those with the necessary knowledge, or you’d never be able to apply them.

Baldoir carefully held the gun as he sought verification with me.

“By the way, Lyle-sama. How many troops are you assembling apart from us?”

I returned back to my paperwork.

“From the entirety of the alliance, thirty to forty thousand. I’ve already borrowed close to ten thousand from Cartaffs. Under my actual control, including your men, close to five hundred. With the entire force of South Beim, not even two thousand.”

Hearing those words, Baldoir cried out.

“Hold it right there! You plan on fighting the armies of Bahnseim with those numbers!?”

It’s true, they had forces exceeding three hundred thousand. If we fought that, victory would be a dream of a distant dream.

“Eh? No way. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not trying to breach a massive foe with a small force.”

Baldoir was flustered.

“In that case, you aim to break it piece by piece? But with such a difference in number…”

This time’s war had a meaning of supplementing my insufficient military force. Of all else, there was meaning in using soldiers of Bahnseim.

If I were to borrow soldiers from other countries, it would create a large debt post-war. What I hated most was the fact that matter was directly related to the power balance of the harem. No, I guess that didn’t matter for now.

“Piece by piece is standard fare. But right now, Bahnseim’s true aim isn’t me, but Beim. There are ways to go about it. Well, I won’t do any reckless charges.”

There, Baldoir laughed just a bit.

“What?”

“No. I just thought Lyle-sama was a splendid man of the Walt House, is all.”

For some reason, his words did not sound like a compliment to me.

Seven: Fortress Conquering

… Taking a detour from Redant Fortress in favor of the craggy mountain road, the elite force of Centralle led by Breid proceeded forward, sending local guides and hired mercenaries to lead the way.

The single-file line traversing the narrow trail seemed to carry on endlessly, and when that road that was rarely ever used was marched on by so many, it became an exceedingly dangerous one.

Enough that once they'd found a place to rest and spread out tents, the mercenary chiefs and local men intruded on Breid, and pleaded for him to retreat and rejoin the main force.

"Any further is impossible. A hundred in scale is one thing, but a large force exceeding ten thousand. I went ahead and scouted out, but there are quite a few treacherous points. I can't think you'll be able to transport so many people across them."

Before the mercenary brigade… an organization practically a gathering of adventurers, Breid was annoyed.

(Trash. You aren't thankful that I'm even hiring you in the first place?)

In the past, he was worked hard by Lyle, and as a result had his achievements conceded to him, yet Breid held animosity towards the boy. By transitive, he hated adventurers as well. Before he met Lyle, he had looked down on them regardless.

Still, at this point, they had become targets great enough for hatred. The reason he hired them despite that was because he thought he was of the caliber to do the same as Lyle, or accomplish even greater feats.

The local guides were those that hunted in these mountains. They

hunted in small teams, and when moving, had only experience of travelling in few.

“Dear knight, moving in these numbers is impossible. There have already been injuries, and with all the narrow parts of the path, I can’t think I’ll get you there by the appointed date.”

In his tent, Breid sat on a chair, as he listened to their opinions.

“I know how absurd it may be. But only by accomplishing such a deed do we leave our names in history, correct? If we break through and circle around the Fortress, we can largely decrease the casualties of Bahnseim.”

While his mouth let out a proper-sounding argument, within his mind, the memories of his Gryphon subjugation with Lyle were playing back. He thought he could have done more. And yet Lyle had left him on the reserves the entire time.

The boy was formerly of a count house. A driven-out incompetent. Yet the one who performed on the battlefield was Lyle, and Breid had only been promoted with those merits conceded.

… He didn’t want to accept that fact. Now that Celes had given the order, Breid harbored a feeling you could call unjust resentment towards Lyle.

The mercenary brigade chief addressed him.

“Any more is impossible! If it’s now, you can still turn back and meet up with the main body! If played poorly, the fortress will have fallen before we get out of the mountains!”

On those words, Breid’s brow moved. While making sure his opponent couldn’t discern his irritation, he nodded a number of times.

“Understood. Then we shall divide the army. Five thousand shall proceed ahead. In that case, we should be able to arrive ahead of schedule, I’m sure.”

The guide hunter still seems unsatisfied. The mercenary chief as well, but the right to decide lay with Breid, so he abided it.

Seeing the attitudes of the two, Breid thought in his head.

(Incompetent lot. Why can't they understand the importance of my plan? If this plan succeeds, among the others commanding armies of thirty thousand, I'll stand at the top. Celes-sama will rejoice, and I'll be a man who exceeds Lyle.)

To Lyle, who'd used ploys to defeat a monster army larger than his, Breid burned with a rivalry much greater than is healthy, as he failed to see what was around him…

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… On the other side.

At Redant Fortress, an army exceeding two hundred thousand marched down the narrow pathes. From the start, it was a terrain that didn't let one make the best of numerical advantage, on top of being a place for battle advantageous to the other side.

From the fortress, the cannons blew, and magic and arrows fell like rain on the armies of Bahnseim.

But commanding from the front line, Blois looked at Redant Fortress' attacks, as he touched a hand to his jaw.

"I can't think they defeated that monster army with something of this level. As I thought, the presence of a commander is a vital thing. If they had a commander who knew the fundamentals, they'd surely give us greater casualty."

While Blois laughed as he made himself meek behind the large shield he'd prepared, his fully-equiped adjutant looked fed-up.

"General, quit laughing, and hurry up and breach already. We've already investigated all their trap placements, and decided the route of advance. If we disable traps for the sake of retreat, our role will be over."

The role of Blois' unit was to go out front, and take care of the traps. Through the mercenaries that had flowed out of Beim, they had paid

a pretty penny to buy the information. And even now, there were personnel within the Fortress gathering its internal affairs.

Blois took off his helmet, and scratched his head. But keeping it off was dangerous, so he swiftly slammed it back down.

“Oh dear~, when they’re giving us such a grand and sporadic reception, I wanted to expend them a bit for the men to come, you see. But as a practical problem, the cannons are troublesome.”

To defend against the cannon shells, they used a Magic Shield to kill the momentum, but as they were on a gentle slope, the balls of iron would still roll, and trip up soldiers.

“Hmm, let’s dig a hole to ditch them. Let’s make it so they’ll naturally end up in it if they roll.”

Blois immediately put up countermeasures, when magic impacted the defensive line of shields. A dust cloud rose, and perhaps Blois had inhaled it, as he broke into a fit of coughing.

The adjutant issued orders around, and once night fell, they would start into work.

“Now then, before the ones behind us start shouting for us to do our job, let’s do a plain advance. Move forward avoiding where the traps are placed. But they’ve already prepared rocks to drop down the cliffs, so until another force removes them, we can’t get too close.”

Blois’ unit, advancing bit by bit. They disarmed trap after trap, and prepared a path for the following force to go down.

The adjutant looked atop the fortress.

“… Still, it really is terrible. I think we’d be more troubled if they shot more professionally, or incessantly.”

There were times the arrows they fired were burned up by the magic fired alongside it. They were attacking blindly, and it was unthinkable they had gotten any decent training. Once Blois looked upon the scene his adjutant took in…

“Oh my, they’ve broken into a quarrel top the wall. Adding onto

magic and arrow efficiency, thinking of their personnel and the consumables they'd have to gather… as I thought, Beim is a threat."

The adjutant looked at him, and smiled a bit.

"Revising your evaluation? You did say they're scarier in times of peace, did you?"

On those words, Blois shook his head.

"Sorry, I've no intent to take that back. Look, it seems we've finished removing the traps. Let's advance."

Issuing commands to his subordinates, Blois made another plain advance…

7

South Beim.

By the time Bahnseim's armies arrived at Redant Fortress, I was putting our gathered info in order alongside Monica.

There was a sofa in the place I used as a work room. There, having returned from the fortress, Rauno sat and drank his tea.

"Hah, I'd prefer you'd give me ale."

Monica smile.

"I thought you'd say that, so I laced the tea ever-so-slightly. But right now we're in the middle of work, so please take it seriously."

Pushing his back into the sofa, and shrugging his shoulders, Rauno-san put down the cup, and leaned forward. His expression turned serious.

"I've already gotten my information together, so you need only read through it. But about Redant Fortress I dropped by along the way, it'll be breached sooner than anticipated. People of the mercenary brigades have already infiltrated within. The one who did it was Blois Cadel. You know, that general who established stable rule next

door.”

Looking over Rauno-san’s materials, I nodded a few times.

“A former Centralle General uncharmed by Celes, is it? I heard he volunteered for his current station, thought?”

Monica put an eye through the documents, informing me of an interesting thing she found in its contents.

“None of his unit was gathered from Centralle, they’re all from elsewhere. From places uninvolved with Celes. How interesting.”

Rauno-san nodded.

“If you plan to lure anyone out, general Blois is the one to shoot for. His evaluation in Centralle is low, but seeing his worth ethic, he isn’t incompetent. It’s more proper to say he ran from Centralle, and moved east. But of all the forces they’ve sent, the elites of Centralle alone are no good. They’re a group centered on Celes’ charmed. Luring them away is downright impossible, I’d say.”

There were other individuals likely charmed by Celes he picked out. The safe one was general Blois, is how it seems. It didn’t look as if he was acting for her sake.

And if he were only playing that part, there were a number of strange points on the contrary. Monica looked at the papers.

“The main members have been charmed. Of the rank and file, the thirty thousand elites are a given. Other than that, the feudal lords, generals, knight brigade heads… Chicken Dickwad, there’s an overwhelming lack of usable commanders.”

When increasing personnel, a lack of people on the management side became a problem. Borrowing them from elsewhere was also a problem. If you pulled them from their original post, it would raise problems where I took them from.

In the Jewel, the Fifth took in Monica’s opinion, and spoke earnestly.

『Even if you can gather just the numbers, if you don’t educate people to lead them, it’s no use at all. There are quite a few out

there who can get together a few, but the more you get, the less you'll find. If you grow it even further… there are even less who can take charge of a scale of thousands.』

With Baldoir's inclusion, we had more people capable of commanding to an extent. But just adding one wasn't enough.

"The best option would just be to pull general Blois out, unit and all."

Rauno-san agreed with that opinion.

"Right. I'm sure that's best. That general has his subordinates, so perhaps he'll be able to command up to fifty thousand?"

Rauno-san randomly threw that out but it did seem he had the ability and the men to move that scale. Of all else, when he first entered the ruined land, he was commanding several tens of thousands of troops.

I thought over my own available comrades.

"Novem is magic specialized. She's capable of leading troops and fighting, but if possible, I want to keep her on the back lines. Clara is back lines without a doubt. Shannon is not applicable. Eva, if it's only a few… no, could she lead her brethren elves? It's not possible for May…"

The members who could lead a considerable scale were considerably limited.

"Aria and Miranda, I guess. Maksim-san said he had led a few hundred before, but while we're at it, I'll have him lead some thousands."

Monica gave advice.

"If you station Valkyries as aides, I think they'll be able to lead to an extent. Well, it seems those piles of scrap have had a version upgrade, so they've gotten just a bit useful. Of course, the one you need by your side is this Monica alone."

I let the nonsensical later half slide.

And at the end, Rauno-san spoke to me.

“And I investigated the point you specified. It’s true if it’s battle, that place would be best, but… there are folks invading, and a war’s just begun, you know? I think it’s a bit soon to think of what’s to come after that.”

I looked at Rauno-san.

“I’m sure. But it’s already begun. The one to end it will be me or Celes… only when one of us dies will it be graced with a stop.”

My fight with Celes had already begun.

❼

… Within the Jewel.

Conceding his own chair to Milleia, sitting on the round table, the Fifth sent a glance to his daughter.

『Hey, how long until I can give my Skill to Lyle? I think it’s better I just hand it over already, you know?』

While Lyle had begun his fight with Bahnseim, the Fifth was thinking of handing his own Skill down to Lyle. But saying there was something he had yet to say, Milleia had stopped him.

However…

『….. Eh?』

Milleia looked blankly at the Fifth’s face. And she averted her eyes as she broke into a sweat.

『Oy… oy!』

The Fifth jumped down from the table, approached Milleia, and grasped both her her shoulders. Milleia smiled with just her mouth.

『D-dear me, father… didn’t I… already tell you that I lifted the restrictions ages ago?』

The Third and Seventh looked upon that exchange of father and daughter from the side. And they sent looks of sympathy towards the Fifth.

The Third even…

『I wonder what it is. I get the feeling he's missed his timing by a large margin. If the Fifth entrusted his Skill much sooner, it would've been a nice scene.』

It's not like there was a rule that they had to give a cool parting. But it was clear up to that point each had his share of drama, and they had made a clear parting with Lyle.

The Seventh as well.

『Terrible. This is all auntie's fault. Though she's always terrible regardless.』

Perhaps Milleia understood, as today she was unable to point her gun at the Seventh. And that alone made the Seventh look lonely.

But the Fifth took his hands off of her shoulders.

『I-if that's the case, then say something sooner. It's true it feels I've overstayed my welcome, but I fulfilled my goal, is all. Then I'll give Lyle the Skill when it seems convenient for him.』

Acting like he didn't care, he clearly cared. Seeing him like that, Milleia sweat harder.

『… I-I'll do something about it. It's father's all-important parting, so this Milleia will definitely put on a moving performance!』

There, the Third.

『Something like that contrarily fails to rouse the audience, or rather, it'll feel quite forced in various ways. It'll just be trouble to both Lyle and the Fifth.』

Perhaps the Fifth was imagining a scene of when it failed, as he covered his face with his left hand.

『… Milleia, I've had enough. This much is more than enough for me.

So I’m begging you, just let me go.』

There, pressed by the three men, Milleia stood.

『Once you’ve said that much, I can’t stay silent! If it’s come to this, I’ll open the grandest of parties!』

The Fifth panicked, as he grasped Milleia’s shoulders again.

『I’m fine! Seriously, don’t! I get the feeling it’ll take the turn for something worse!』

Within the Jewel, a large problem was breaking out irrelevant to the war…

Fame

… A small building prepared in South Beim.

Constructed nearby the Labyrinth in South Beim, the adventurer guild was smaller than any branch in Beim, and the number of receptionists working in it was very small.

The ones dispatched by the Guild began with Marianne, and went onto Rühe and a few others. And they were dealing with the problem by hiring hands from the local area.

Very few adventurers set South Beim as their home base.

But that wasn't to say it didn't have work.

Today once more, the residents of the city brought their requests over to the Guild. To one of those residents, Marianne spoke.

"I truly apologize. Our South Beim branch isn't yet ready to accept requests. So we are in a state where we cannot accept your request."

The one she dealt with was a middle-aged woman.

"That would be troubling! Over here, we're busy with moving on top of raising a child! It's a simple request, so just send someone already!"

Wife of a craftsman who'd moved in from Beim. Or perhaps a woman from a nearby village. Marianne explained the same thing a number of times, before she finally stood and left. The number of adventurers, even if there was a first-rate party when it came to Labyrinths, other than that, there was only Erhart, and some dreaming youths who'd gathered from around.

Not knowing the fundamentals of adventuring, it wasn't thinkable they were capable of clearing requests just yet. To add to that, the branch had only just been set up, and there were various problems to be dealt with.

"Marianne-san, a complaint from the merchants that materials are insufficient…"

When one of the personnel apologetically reported, tired as she was, Marianne coped with a smile.

"They will have to bear it. If they want something, they'll either have to make a personal request to an adventurers, or raise the sale price to lower…"

This time, the one who entered the Guild was Rühe.

"Marianne-san, it's about the Magic Stones in our custody, at this rate, there is a possibility we'll run out…"

When winter came, the expenditure of Magic Stones went up. At present, craftsmen were expending a large quantity of them in their crafts. So it couldn't be helped that the stones managed by this small Guild were insufficient.

If you called her the Branch Head, it had a nice ring to it, but it was sought from Marianne to work harder than anyone in this newly-set-up adventurers' guild.

At that moment, it was Damien's turn to make his way in. Taking along his three automaton maids, and hanging his large staff against his shoulders, he pushed his glasses up with his fingertips.

"You're in quite a hurry. Rather, just what is happening here? The Magic Stones I asked for have yet to be delivered, you know? At this rate, my research shall lag…"

From behind him, Letarta the Dwarf made an appearance.

"Oy, you got any Rare Metal on you? If it's money, that Fidel whelp or Lyle whelp are in debt to me, and they said they'd put out any amount, so I'd like all you've got."

The ones who brought trouble one after the next were always those related to Lyle.

(It's… no good… can I really make it here…)

Every time Marianne dealt with a painstaking wave of trouble, she felt the fatigue creep in…

❼

A complaint from South Beim's adventurers' guild.

While I read the bitter outcries transcribed on paper, I listened to the reports. The reports were coming in from the Valkyries stationed all over to check the state of the war, through Monica.

"Chicken dickwad. The Bahnseim army has drawn near the walls of Redant Fortress. They're conducting some plain harassment, as they accumulate weariness within. Making an approach bit-by-bit, and they've even shown movements to retrieve their enemy's arrows."

In the office, I stretched.

"Redant Fortress hadn't shown any effective movements, was it? How fares the fortress's insides?"

Monica replied immediately.

"It seems they've requested for reinforcements. But movements in Beim are dull, it seems."

Hearing that, I decided to retreat the Valkyries.

"… Pull back the Valkyries lurking in Beim. We need only continue watching Fortress Redant."

That the movements in Beim were slow might mean the opinions of merchants was divided. As long as there wasn't a clear top dog, I've heard it was quite a pain if opinions diverged. Even if there was a lord or king, it was still trouble when the views of vassals and advisors didn't align.

Then what of merchants who prioritized their own profits? I had anticipated from the start, but this was too terrible.

“I pity the soldiers of Beim.”

Monica shrugged at me.

“The chicken who only watches Beim’s fall to hell from his perch is guilty of the same sin. Isn’t that splendid? It’s set in stone you’re going to hell when you die.”

I laughed.

“Sorry. I’ve already known my destination for a while, it’s not going to scare me at this point.”

Since I decided to fight Celes, I had killed many humans for the sake of my own fame. At this point, I doubt any argument of ‘I don’t want to go to hell’ would pass. Of course, that’s only a talk of, ‘if it exists’.

Monica pinched her skirt’s hem with her fingertips, and gave a bow. In contrast to the foulness of her mouth, her gestures were perfect.

“In that case, this Monica shall accompany you there. Good for you; now feel relief, you easily-lonely pitiful excuse for a man… this is where you should be rejoicing, you know?”

That didn’t make me happy at all… okay, maybe it did, but personally I feel doubtful over whether automatons have anything to do with the afterlife.

“Now then, let’s end the jokes here. A complaint came from the guild. On top of a lack of adventurers, there is too much demanded from it, they say. Now who should I send?”

Monica immediately corrected her posture, and looked at me.

“Why not Eva, May and Marina, those three? In regards to May, there isn’t any urgent business she has to attend to at present. As long as Eva calls out to her brethren, it’s thinkable she’ll be able to gather people and challenge the Labyrinth.”

Eva hailed from a famous tribe among the elves called the【Nihil】,

and she was relatively trusted. Apart from minstrel elves, the dark elf tribes that lived in and maintained the forests also took a favorable attitude towards her.

“Then we’ll have them gather and challenge it. Gather some folks with time on their hands, and put them to work in the Labyrinth. Other than that…”

As I thought over who else to send, Milleia-san made a rare request to me.

『Lyle, do you have a minute?』

❼

… Beim’s conference of merchants.

Once the war with Bahnseim had reached a full-blown beginning, the main members all gathered. Calling forth the head soldier who had seen the battle from the fortress, he was in the middle of pleading to the merchants for reinforcements.

“Bahnseim’s army, while moving slowly, is disarming traps as it proceeds forward. We have been attacking them, but they have put up countermeasures, and there is no sign their march will come to a halt. At this rate, they shall attach themselves to the first wall. Please send reinforcements!”

In regards to the head soldier’s desperate plea, one of the merchants posed a question. Panicked as the soldier was, the merchants had yet to show any panic themselves. Because they had plenty of soldiers to defend themselves, and they trusted in the walls of the city called Beim.

“You’ve made no mention of it; what are the casualties within the fortress?”

The head soldier made a bit of a troubled face.

“Within the fortress, there are only a few injured, and there have yet to be any deaths. But at this rate…!”

There, one of the merchants let out a sigh.

“Even if we did some work on the fortress, even its current numbers have exceeded maximum capacity, have they not? Even if we send reinforcements now, it will only make a narrower space to fight.”

From there, various opinions to deny reinforcements came out.

“Reinforcements when there hasn’t been a single casualty?”
“Last time, it was even more terrible, yet it defeated a foe several times greater, correct? Though a sprinkle of cowardice was involved.”
“We’ve sent goods there en masse. And we should be fighting with terms advantageous to our side.”

Receiving those chastising merchant eyes, the head soldiers persisted that reinforcements were needed regardless. He knew this would happen if he asked for reinforcements before any casualties. That’s why he didn’t include them in his report.

But Bahnseim’s troops were disarming traps as if they were aware of their location beforehand, and their steady approach was more than enough for one to know they were dangerous.

The man’s shouts fell on deaf ears. However, to such a meeting room, a messenger soldiers hurriedly raced in.

“What is this? We’re in the middle of an important meeting…”

When one of the merchants criticized the runner, he raced over to the head soldier. Perhaps he had ran in a hurry from his steed, as the messenger was terribly tired.

“What’s wrong? What happened!?”

The messenger spoke on out of breath.

“T-the first wall has been breached! The close to twenty thousand soldiers stationed on it… less than half were able to return to the fortress!”

In a mere few days since the start of the war, the first wall had been breached…

7

… Redant Fortress.

On top of the captured first wall, Blois stretched out on a job well done. His adjutant knight had removed his helmet, and was holding it under his right arm.

“When our information is so precise, the other generals began showing motivation as well. The knight brigade chiefs even chased the retreating forces until the fortress was before their very eyes.”

All the way to the wall’s capture, Blois had been on the front line, and by its capture, the other generals confirmed there was no mistake in the information, now volunteering for the front line one after another to nab up the achievements.

They had already obtained the information, and they only needed to overcome the small sporadic resistance Beim could offer up. They were no enemy to Bahnseim.

“Because there’s few chances for knights to perform in a siege. Only when we invade, or on their horses to give chase, perhaps? Come to think of it, there are quite a few chances. But I doubt Beim will come out for a battle on the plains, so I can understand why they’d be burning for merits.”

Seeing Blois so relaxed, the adjutant cleared his throat. Because there were soldiers of Bahnseim around, and they were looking at their general.

Blois cleared his throat as well.

“Well, we’ve allies within the fortress as well, and they’ll launch attacks from the inside as planned. But Beim sure is luxurious. They’ve mountains of goods in those walls. If that’s how it’s going to be, then we who were worried of our own supply can fight in peace.”

From the get-go, Blois planned to steal the enemy Beim’s supplies as he marched. Their insufficient arrows were supplemented with those retrieved from Beim, and he planned to collect food and armor

in a similar fashion along the way. Because if he didn't, the feudal lords who entered Beim would go right into attacking the surrounding towns and villages.

"We've got ample supplied in our hands. I do hope this lessens plunder a bit."

The adjutant tilted his head.

"We were able to distribute plenty, haven't we? I'm sure the lords understand any more is meaningless…"

Blois halted that opinion with an ominous laugh.

"That's how you thought of it? You're still green. They all have different circumstance, but to feudal lords, plunder in war is a valuable source of income. I'm sure they've heard of Beim's abundance, and I'm sure it'll become something terrible. What's more, the mercenaries from Beim know the locations of villages, and even the finer details on them. They said they hadn't been earning for a while, so just what will come of it."

As Blois thought over the deeds Bahnseim's army would commit once it was released from this fortress, he let out a sigh. And he felt a disappointment at his confidence that he wouldn't be able to stop them.

"… We were ordered to wait on standby here, but was that for better or worse?"

Seeing Blois worry, the adjutant could only look on from the side…

❼

South Beim.

I took Eva, May and Marina-san, and dove into the Labyrinth.

It was a Labyrinth that expanded downwards, and another adventurer party had already reached its lowest layer. It had more than ten floors to it, but it was relatively easy to conquer, abundant in

a large array of monsters.

For that sake, it was an easy Labyrinth to manage.

That's precisely why we had let it remain.

Eventually, it would become an important source of income for South Beim.

Eva looked at me in worry.

"Lyle, didn't you say you were busy? Didn't Monica go on a rampage when you said you were going off to the Labyrinth?"

Monica had work, and taking her out of it would be troublesome, so I left her behind. And when I did, she merely asserted that she would go along as well.

"There wasn't any rampage. She was simply too annoying when she tried showing off all her functions that I left her behind. And I don't plan on spending more than a few days earning in here."

I wasn't an adventurer, and I wasn't getting a reward for this. Though I did plan on paying Eva, May and Marina-san for coming along.

"Or rather, are you alright here, Marina-san? They tried to keep you in Beim, didn't they?"

Wearing a fur coat as usual, with metal protectors on her arms and legs, Marina-san shrugged her shoulders.

"I want to fight the strong. I lost to May, but I want a fight with you as well."

She had gone from calling May girly, to just May. It seems she was a musclehead who would obey because she had been defeated.

A woman increasingly like the First. I'm sure they would've gotten along if they talked.

May looked at me.

"Even so, what do you want to do in this Labyrinth at this point?

From your point of view, wouldn't it be too easy, Lyle?"

As she said she didn't get what I wanted to accomplish, I gave a simple explanation of the Guild's present state.

"The Guild came crying. It looks like Marianne-san is at her limit, so I have to lend a hand… it will really be troublesome if that person collapses."

The only decent person we had with the knowhow to manage a Labyrinth was Marianne-san. Rühe-san came as well, but even if she was good at her job, she was a receptionist and nothing more. A person whose future I could count on, but wasn't at a stage where she could move people.

May shook her head. But for some reason she looked a little sorrowful.

"That isn't what I meant. Even if you didn't come, anyone else would've been fine, is what I'm trying to say. Trouble will come from you slipping out of your job, Lyle."

I silently walked forward.

The Jewel… Milleia-san's request was for me to spend some time in the Labyrinth with May. The truth is, the Guild matter was just the official reason. On Milleia-san's request, I was accompanying May. It was faint, but even I could understand it.

"… It's about time. There's a person who's about to go away. So I wanted to make a little time before that."

May seemed to understand, as she gave a short reply.

"… So that's it."

And she muttered to herself.

"I see… so we're parting again Next time… I doubt there'll be a next time."

Betrayal

… Redant Fortress.

The first wall had been taken, and the armies of Bahnseim were in formation before them. They were lined up in a narrow space, but made sure to avoid the cannons' line of fire.

The commander of the fortress, a commanding officer of Beim watched as he grit his teeth.

"… How in the…"

The traps they placed were thoroughly disarmed, and they weren't able to afford much casualty to Bahnseim. The rocks meant to fall from the cliffs were removed before Bahnseim could pass under, rendered completely useless.

"How in the hell are we losing!?"

In this restricted space, a tactic of numbers wouldn't work. So surely Bahnseim was fighting at a disadvantage. It was common sense in this world that the defending side held an advantage over the offense.

And yet before Bahnseim's advance, the fortress had already put out casualties close to half their numbers. Deaths and injuries. Even if they had supplies in excess, they couldn't even use them to stall the enemy.

The quality of their equipment didn't fall short of their foe. More so, theirs was of a higher quality than Bahnseim's. When the first wall was breached, a rescue squad had been sent from the fortress. But they had lost to Bahnseim's knights.

They were numerous. They had the better equipment. Yet they lost. Deputy commander offered council to the commander.

“Commander, at this rate, we’re on a one way road of falling morale. Why not move the injured to the back, and draft more for the front lines?”

“We’ve already done that! It’s because the merchants were so frugal that it came to this!”

With expensive armor over his body, the commander was the third son of a merchant house. His body was of large build. When he found he had no business ability, and was unable to help out his house, he had aimed to become a soldier. From there, he received the support of his house through promotions, and now he was appointed commander of the fortress.

The commander whose heart danced at the prospect of moving over fifty thousand. But reality was cruel.

Into the conference room of the fortress burst a messenger.

“Bahnseim’s army has infiltrated the fortress! Both sides are clashing on top of the walls, but so many Bahnseim soldiers are climbing up that we cannot handle it! Reinforcements please! Please send reinforcements!”

In a limited space, both sides sent troops into close combat, it seems. But the soldiers of Bahnseim were defeating the soldiers of the fortress and moving on.

“Have the adventurers deal with them!”

At those words, the messenger seemed vexed.

“Well… most of the adventurers have already been taken out. There are some whose leaders were assassinated on the premises, rendering them immobile.”

Alongside the start of the attack, the mercenary members lurking within had made their move. Assassinating the main adventurers, they had brought about Bahnseim’s advantage.

“A-assassination, you say… how? How did the enemy infiltrate us!?”

Following on, a beaten messenger fell into the room. Bloodstained, and of feeble breath.

“What!? What happened!?”

The messenger tried to let out his voice. But perhaps he hadn’t the strength, as only a small sound came out. When the irritated commander carelessly approached, the messenger man gave a grin. He clung onto the commander, and stuck a sword through the gaps in his armor.

“Thanks for that. I never thought the commander would be the one to come close.”

Right after, men wearing the armor of Beim’s side surged into the room one after the next.

“Che, so he’s the one that gets the commander’s head. Got to make do with the rest, I guess.”

Even if the fortress’ conference room was wide, it was still a room. With dagger and shield, the mercenaries took over Beim’s command room. And the weapons of the commanding soldiers were swords and longswords, and other armaments too long for the task.

“Bastards, you turned coat!?”

Hearing those words, the mercenaries hesitated a moment, before suddenly bursting into laughter.

“Turned coat? That’s wrong. The other side had better conditions. And since I got the feeling they would win, I chose to side with them is all. From the start, we were on the other sides. But your naivety really was a huge help. So… die for the sake of our riches.”

The upper command faces fought the mercenaries in the conference room. The guarding soldiers tried to surround them and take them out. The mercenaries certainly faced casualties, but without paying mind to such a thing, they continued slashing on.

The deputy commander was stabbed by three men’s daggers and

fell to the ground. Spilling blood, and with a pale face, he looked up at the man managing the mercenaries before his eyes.

“Do you know what you lot are doing? Beim will… the Guild will never forgive you guys.”

On those words, the mercenaries laughed harder. As the Deputy looked around, one of the mercs leaned over to look into his face.

“Oh how scary. But listen here… the guild you speak of is Beim’s Guild, right? Could it be you seriously believe no one can lay hands on the Guild? Bahnseim has seriously come to crush Beim, you know?”

The deputy opened his eyes wide.

“It couldn’t be you guy plan on… Beim… Do you understand!? If Beim is gone, you are all the ones who are going to be troubled!”

The deputy commander was kicked to the side by the mercenary mediator.

“You sure are loud with those condescending eyes. We aren’t the dogs of the merchants or the Guild. We helped them out when things were going well between us. If we can’t earn bread in Beim anymore, then we have to go somewhere where we can, right…? oh, already croaked, have you?”

Losing interest in the silent deputy commander, the mercenary gave orders to establish contact with Bahnseim’s side.

“Oy, tell Bahnseim we took out the general. With that, our reward’s going to become something extraordinary.”

The laughing mercenaries. Ironically, the fortress of the city of merchants and adventurers had fallen by the hands of adventurers… by mercenaries…

7

… By the time Blois moved himself to the fortress, everything was

over.

There were traces of blood everywhere you looked. That's just how intense of a battle it had been, but even so, it had ended quite one-sidedly. Looking at the result, it was Bahnseim's complete victory. Without any conspicuous casualties, and obtaining a large quantity of supplies from Beim's camp, Bahnseim's army could march straight to Beim's city districts without anything of value lost.

Entering the cleaned-up conference room, Blois gave apology to the generals who'd already arrived.

"Shucks~ looks like I came in late. My apologies."

One of the generals overlooked his light air and attitude. Their victory had put him in a good mood.

"You were at the first wall after all. There's no helping you be late. Now then, to continue the conference."

The supreme commanding officer opened his mouth.

"We will march straight to Beim. And also. The feudal lords have their demands. We will be procuring goods from the area."

On those words, Blois thought.

(So human desires are never sated. As expected, it's come to this.)

The lords of Baron and below who took part all rejoiced at the words of pillage.

"Even if there were supplies within the fortress, we're an army of over three hundred thousand, after all. It's a tad lacking if we wish to take Beim."

For the shameless viscount taking part, a count who'd been silently folding his arms voiced his approval.

"We've kept the soldiers waiting. If we keep them contained so long, it will be beyond our power if they run amok."

A baron still young in years immediately nominated himself.

“In that case, we will proceed north from here.”

There, the other lords raised voices of disapproval.

“The north is the most developed part, is it not? A baron will surely be shot down. Why not let us take charge of it?”

“How rude. You saw the weak men of Beim, didn’t you? Losing to that would be the disgrace of a feudal lord.”

Jovial voices ruled the room. Within all that, Blois alone looked depressed. The lords were laughing, but what was to come from it was a tale laughs wouldn’t atone for. Based on how things went, some may even burn whole villages, and kill off their populaces.

The reason the lords were so serious over the matter was because they had heard that Beim was a land without any lords where each village was guaranteed prosperity. Unable to offer any proper resistance, and the adventurers they relied on were busy with defending the city. It wasn’t by much, but they couldn’t think they would lose.

From what Blois had researched, it was the perfect hunting ground.

(It’s true I’m not quite pleased. But it’s not like saying that will stop anyone. And our capital really plans on annihilating Beim. If I speak out of turn, I’ll be the one punished.)

Blois didn’t think the world turned on nothing but pretty words. But still stood the fact he felt unsatisfied with himself.

And the supreme commander looked at Blois and opened his mouth.

“By the way, General Blois. You performed splendidly in that battle before. I’ll report to Centralle that your contributions were great. I’m counting on you in Beim’s capture as well.”

Blois smiled.

“No, I’ve only done what I could. Rather than me, the other generals are…”

The moment he tried to humble himself, and pass the evaluation onto

others. The door to the conference room opened. There stood Breid.

The scornful eyes of generals, knights, and lords concentrated on him. The supreme commander held his head, and gave a grandiose gesture of shaking it to the side.

“Good grief, how pitiful. Not only did you ignore opposition to move independently, you didn’t even make it for the battle. The polar opposite of General Blois.”

Blois thought inside.

(Really, stop it. Breid-dono is staring daggers at me. With that, you’ve definitely made me his enemy.)

Even for Blois, it was difficult to follow through for Breid, who leapt off saying he’d take a detour and didn’t make it in time. If there was something he could say…

“Supreme commander, I doubt anyone would have imagined we could take the fortress in such a short time. The work of the other generals in its fall was brilliant. I don’t think it fair to blame this untimeliness on Breid-dono alone. More so, isn’t it everyone’s responsibility for doing such a smashing job of taking it?”

When Blois said that, the surrounding general, knight chiefs and lords burst into laughter.

“He has a point. If they knew the enemy would be so weak, I’m sure the royal guard and elites would’ve stayed behind.”
“They traversed such a treacherous mountain. It would be cruel to treat them so coldly. They must’ve faced considerable casualty as well.”
“That’s right, it wasn’t that they didn’t make it, we were simply too strong. There’s nothing that will come of criticizing the head of the royal guard.”

Within the surrounding laughter, Breid was glaring at Blois more and more. Blois wanted just a bit of his gratitude for having changed the subject. The supreme commander called for Breid to sit. The only open seat was the one furthest from him.

“Now then, we’ll be moving as scheduled. And we’ll be dispersing our troops, but make sure to keep a firm grasp on the reigns. We cannot do something if they go out of control. Don’t forget to gather them at the meeting point by the time we’re set to march as one.”

Once the supreme commander stood, the lords and generals gathered for the meeting followed suit, and left the meeting room. While looking at Breid.

“Good job making it to the meeting.”
“If it were me, I’d be too embarrassed to live on.”
“It’s because he’s Celes-sama’s favorite. That alone made him captain. Isn’t it a tad too harsh for us to depend on his competence?”

Blois was the last one to leave the room, and as he passed by Breid.

“… You dimwit general who became one merely by being born to it. Don’t be so conceited over a moment’s merits.”

Standing right after, Breid pushed passed Blois, and left the room first. Blois let out a sigh.

“No matter what I do, he hates me. Good grief, why am I in such a troublesome standing again?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he left the room last.

There was a single Baronet observing the state of that conference room…

7

… Breid kicked his belongings in the personal room in the fortress he’d been assigned.

“Each and every one of them! It isn’t my fault! I was late because the guides and mercenaries were so hesitant! If they hadn’t been like that, we would… no, I would…!”

The furniture left in the room was in tatters. Breid didn't feel his rage subsiding at all. But he planned to rampage until it was contained.

To his room came a knock at the door.

"Who is it!?"

The door opened, and the ones in the doorway were two Baronets. From Breid's point of view, they were foes not worth his time. The soldiers they brought into the fray numbered one or two hundred at most. As they weren't anything special, he didn't bother to greet them.

"What's your business? I'm busy!"

Those two Baronets. One was the Baronet who'd made a promise with Adele.

"… There's something I'd like to pass to the royal guard captain's ears. Though I was mulling over who was the best person to inform."

What was presented was a letter. Breid took it as if snatching it from the man's hand, and confirmed its contents. As he read on, he gradually lifted it in both his hands, the corners of his lips folding up.

That letter with the seal still intact had yet to be read by any. He spoke to the two who'd shown it to him.

"This is… a letter of betrayal."

Written in it was a cooperation request from a member of Lyle's party known as Adele. With his past debt to Lyle, the letter called for his cooperation as he had promised.

Breid looked at the two Baronets.

"Judging by this letter's contents, I assume the two of you are already conspirators."

The other Baronet… the one who'd pushed an impossible request onto Adele explained the situation.

"Betray an army of three hundred thousand, and join Lyle's side with only a few? We aren't so foolish."

The Baronet with a long-standing relation to Adele's house spoke.

"We have already distributed these letters to a number of Knight Class houses. Well, there was some profit in it for us if they agreed to cooperation. But thinking of our own futures, there's no need to even think over who we'll side with. That being the case, you have cooperated with him once before. So we would like to ask if you'll intervene in Centralle."

Lyle's party had betrayed him. With that on his mind, Breid listened to the two.

"Very well. I shall intervene from my side. And will they offer me their own cooperation for the task?"

The two Baronets nodded.

"Of course. However…"

"However?"

As he stood on guard to what the Baronet was about to say, the two began talking about Lyle's plan.

"There may be those who feign betrayal, and hand the letters in. Lyle's conspirators makes use of quite some dirty means. I only wish to warn you about that."

Breid wondered if that was all. But at the same time, he thought it was possible. The two of them had handed the letter without cutting the seal. It would be fine to trust them to an extent.

"Then the moment they bring this tale to another, it's certain they are traitors, I see. Understood. I'll deal with it. And about this letter… I would like to continue correspondence from here on."

The Baronet looked perplexed.

"You'll continue."

A single plan had floated in Breid's head. To drag Lyle's party out, surround them, and strike them down. Seeing the men before him fail to comprehend that, he made fun of them to himself.

(They can’t even think of something so simple?)

“Yes, that’s right. Because it’s an important plan. I’d like the two of you to cooperate. And does anyone else know of this.”

They shook their heads. And they put out Blois’ name.

“That general called Blois isn’t suited. Well, the other generals are more or less in the same boat. But we thought the captain of the royal guard could understand the value of this letter. You actualized the mountain crossing no one else would attempt. While you may not have made it in time, that was merely because Beim was too frail. Under normal circumstance, you’d have made an opportunity to pincer, and your achievements would have been greater than anyone’s.”

Put in a good mood, Breid smiled and nodded.

“Well then, I’ll have to think of a response. If a letter comes, please inform me at once.”

And like that, the battle of Breid and Lyle had become unavoidable…

Plunder

… A village in the territory of Beim.

There, the armies of Bahnseim had flooded in, and gathered the villagers in one spot. Before the anxious-looking villagers, the armed soldiers entered the buildings, grabbing various things, and heaping them up in one pile.

Starting with food, ornaments, and going on to weapons and the like. Around the villagers, the armed youngsters the soldiers had killed were placed in plain view. The notion that resistance was futile on their minds, they abided by fear.

The baron who assaulted the village spoke with his vassal knight.

“What is this lenience? In Bahnseim, they’d either put up a more intense resistance, or present the goods from the start.”

The vassal knight looked at the fearful villagers.

“The clothes they wear and what they carry on them isn’t something you’d think to find in Bahnseim. I heard the tax was low, but it’s as if they aren’t being managed at all. What’s more, the youth lot that came at us were no good at all.”

“Could it be they were grouping us with monsters? As expected of Beim: city of adventurers. They don’t understand a god damn thing.”

The soldiers looked satisfied at the abundance of goods to pilfer. At a glance, you could see the soldiers holding up the clothes and decorations they had found.

“Oy, trade that with me. My place’s daughter is going to be married off soon. I want her clothes to be the best of the best.”

“In that case, give me that pendent you’ve got there. I wanted to make this a present for my wife.”

They were quickly treating what they took as their own, and exchanging them amongst themselves. Among them were some who even broke into fights, but the knights broke in between to mediate them.

The baron looked around, and scoffed.

“Load what we’ve gained on the wagons. And we’ve no further business… burn it.”

Hearing those words, the villagers cried out.

“Wait! When you’ve taken all you could, what need is there to burn–! ”

An arrow stuck into the villager who rose to his feet in protest. A soldier near the baron had fired it, and other soldiers were also ready with their bows.

“And what of it? You lot aren’t my people. And I’ve no interest in any of you. With so much taken from you, how can you expect yourselves to live on? It’s the least amount of mercy I can give. You’ll be killed on the spot.”

A number of knights cast magic, and set the surrounding buildings alight. With the buildings burning up, the villagers burst into tears. And the soldiers fired their arrows without question.

But a majority of them were aimed at the men, and a majority of them missed the women. Seeing that, the baron shook his head to the side, and laughed.

“When it comes to you lot; good grief… make sure we can depart on schedule. And don’t fight amongst yourselves.”

Saying that, he headed towards the mountain of piled pilfer. The soldiers raised cries as they held their fists in the air, pulling the women off by the arms…

❼

… Redant Fortress.

There, Blois saw off the feudal nobles who had departed one after the next since the early morning. He was filled with a complicated feeling. But he didn't have a good enough reason for them to stop.

And for more or less, it was nothing rare to find in war and Bahnseim was no exception. More than that, the land of Beim that had never let itself experience warfare was the greatest hunting ground any lord could ask for.

If he poorly tried to stop it, there were surely some who'd even go as far as assassinating him to get their way.

"Good grief, it's at times like these that one's powerlessness feels so painful."

There were times he had thought to get promoted and stop them. But it wasn't as if promotions were accomplished with pretty words alone, and he hesitated to dabble in the injustice and pillaging he so hated in order to rise in rank.

There, from atop the fortress, he noticed a soldier moving strangely. While remaining wary of their surroundings, they were headed his way. From build and movements, it was likely a woman.

"… An enemy?"

Blois immediately entered the fortress, and taking a few of his men along, he searched out the black-haired woman he had spotted before only to find her inside the fortress.

Leaving a certain room, and moving in the opposite direction from him.

"A moment of your time? What is your affiliation?"

Blois called out in a gentle voice, but his hand was gripping the hilt of his blade. The knight and soldiers around him were wary of the woman as well.

But there, a troublesome individual appeared on the scene.

“How noisy. What’s going on here?”

A voice came from behind Blois’ party, making him turn to find Breid. Blois kept it in his head that this was going to be a pain.

“I spotted a suspicious individual, so I was only calling out to her. And this is one of the rooms lent out to the feudal lords. There are quite a few things I’d like to ask her.”

As Blois seemed cautious of a lord’s betrayal, Breid showed a laugh. Unlike in the meeting the other day, his air was one of leisure.

“She’s no one suspicious. I’ll guarantee it. Now be on your way.”

The black haired… red-eyed female soldier lowered her head without a change in expression, and left the spot with swift feet.

Blois spoke to Breid.

“… Then will you be the one talking?”

He had a bad premonition, and Breid’s answer was just as he expected.

“It’s all part of the plan. Well, my personal plan, I’ll have to add. I’d much appreciate if you wouldn’t barge into it.”

Saying that, Breid entered the room the woman had come out of. Blois decided to faithfully report this matter to the other generals…

❼

… Confirming that Blois had left, Breid complained to the Baronet.

“I’d really like it if you made these letter exchanges less conspicuous.”

“My apologies. And I had the one you just saw write a letter as you specified for delivery.”

Breid belittled the Baronet internally as he nodded.

(It’s troublesome that Blois was the one to spot it. But do these guys have no sense of crisis? Even if they’re abiding my words, I can’t have them dragging my feet. In that case, I should take charge of managing future exchanges. Good grief, incompetent subordinates sure are a pain.)

Breid made the proposal.

“Let me stand witness to the next letter exchange as well.”

He didn’t think he had been outwitted, but for the million-to-one chance, he said as such. There, the Baronet didn’t look particularly troubled.

“Understood. That’s how we’ll arrange it henceforth. In that case, next will be…”

Seeing the Baronet move as he predicted, Breid was put into a delightfully good mood. And once the meeting had finished, the Baronet spoke to him.

“By the way, captain.”

“What is it?”

“It’s about General Blois, he may try to probe around our affairs. Based on how things go, he’ll report it to the other generals, and he may take these merits away from you… it is a situation where we must doubt if the captain of the royal guard can guarantee our safety. Why not take some measures against it?”

Breid immediately replied.

“… Assassination, eh?”

The Baronet hurriedly denied that notion.

“Perish the thought! If an assassination scandal breaks out in a time like this, our plans will be brought to light. Sealing General Blois’ movements, and explaining the situation once you’ve earned your achievements sounds best.”

Breid thought it a pain, but he nodded at the Baronet’s opinion.

(If it's after I've gotten my medals, no one will be able to ignore my opinion. We need only get rid of Blois after that, huh.)

"Understood. I'll make some moves of my own."

While he was at it, he planned to take care of… kill that hindrance Blois when all was said and done…

❼

We had helped out the Guild in the Labyrinth.

But the first thought that came to mind once we got out…

"Um, what's the meaning of nothing at all?"

I had braced myself for the Fifth's parting, but he hadn't said a single word the whole time. Milleia-san was also troubled, and May who felt it would be the end was sending me a chastising glare as if she'd been betrayed.

Within the Jewel.

Surrounding the Fifth, I asked about the situation in the Jewel.

Milleia-san spoke.

『… He locked himself in his room, and wouldn't come out! After I'd prepared for it so much!』

The Fifth glared at Milleia-san as he spoke.

『Don't use May as an excuse! Listen here, saying goodbye in that sort of atmosphere contrarily raises all the hurdles, dammit! If that's how it was going to be, a normal goodbye would've been several times better!』

When I wondered what it was, it seems the Fifth didn't want to go out into the 'Goodbye Party' Milleia-san had devised. It's true the ancestors up to now had never parted with such an atmosphere. To this point, they had left when it was necessary… no, because of me, the Second alone wasn't able to give a proper farewell.

Milleia-san hadn't permitted the succession of the Fifth's Skill. But because I had learned his past, she had lifted the restriction. Failing to inform the Fifth of that fact, he had slipped up the timing to pass the Skill to me.

The Seventh spoke.

『Hey, why not just give it to him here and be over with it? Don't want to make too much a ruckus out of it, and you've already imparted everything you wanted to, right?』

The Fifth was sullen.

『I was forced to impart everything I didn't want to as well. Alright, let's go Lyle.』

While the Fifth tried to lead me into his room of memories, Milleia-san stood in the way.

『That's no good at all! If it's my responsibility, then I have to do something about it!』

The Fifth looked at her.

『And! I'm! Saying! You're being a bother! Listen well, I don't really care about the timing and so forth. My role of passing on my Skill to Lyle is an important one. It's true I can't look cool anymore, but what's more important is giving this Skill to Lyle. So Milleia, just drop it already.』

Within that dubious air, such a conversation came to pass but… I felt there was something I had to tell the ancestors as well.

"I'm sorry, it seems Bahnseim's made its move, so I'm going to have to hurry on my side. It seems I'll be busy, and I don't think I'll be coming back here for a while. Work's just been so hectic lately… I-I really am sorry!"

As I ran to leave, the Fifth extended his hand towards me with an indescribable expression on his face.

… A village in Beim's north.

There, the adventurers hired as guards, and the adventurers that hailed from the village were collapsed on the ground, having been defeated by soldiers. The red blood seeping into the earth gave proof of all the place the fighting had taken place.

A young soldier lifted up one of the adventurers.

"This one's wearing really nice armor. Since I beat him, it's alright if I'm the one who takes it, right?"

Perhaps the soldiers alongside him were from the same town as him, as they laughed.

"I don't mind, but I don't recommend trying to stand out more than our general. Stand out to much, and you'll be the first one aimed at on the battlefield. In that case, you'd better sell it, and build up some funding for yourself."

Listening to such voices from the surroundings, a young Baronet looked around.

"Good grief, they needlessly wasted our time. Did they really think such crude attacks would work on fully-armored soldiers?"

The young Baronet kicked an adventurer who still drew breath. Likely in resentment for a soldier that had died, that single adventurer was being harassed by a number.

The adventurer didn't seem to grasp what was going on.

"W-why… we… the Labyrinth's thirtieth floor…"

Adventurers who had breached the thirtieth floor. They were truly proficient. Adding on the premise of, 'as adventurers'.

The Baronet laughed.

"Having your magicians put on a show like that is just asking for them to be aimed at. For a lot at your level, there are any number of ways to deal with you once surrounded. With your numbers that don't even reach ten, adding deaths and injuries I'll admit you took out more

than twenty of our men. But that's all. Even so, the sword in your hands is truly a splendid one. A magic tool… I'll be the one using it from here on."

There were more than a hundred armed soldiers, and adventurers whose magicians were walking targets for arrows. After that, they need only have those capable of ranged attacks surround and take down any adventurers that jumped out.

The young Baronet used the sword he took from the adventurer to impale its former wielder.

"You seem delighted at your abilities of monster slaying, but… you were too oblivious of the battlefield. This is why those misunderstanding adventurers are so troublesome."

Testing the sharpness of his new blade. At that moment, some mercenaries drew close.

"Boss, please don't forget our services."

To the grinning mercenaries, the Baronet directed a smile.

"Of course I won't. I give my thanks for guiding us all the way to the village. You can dispute how to distribute the promised loot amongst yourselves. Now then, once we're done here, where shall we head next?"

Around, the soldiers pillaged and assaulted women. When the village men who couldn't stand to watch took their weapons in hand and came at them, the soldiers impaled them on their spears, and shot them through with their bows.

The mercenaries looked at that Baronet's men.

"Even so, you've even less mercy than us mercs."

The Baronet spoke with a smile.

"I've experienced even crueler battlefields in Bahnseim. But when their resistance was so weak, even my heart starts to hurt. Of course, even if that's the case, I've no intent to go light on them. Now let us make haste. If we linger, the other lords will snatch our

prize away.”

There were problems in Beim. Using the power of money, they had experienced too long a period of peace. Exchanging the blood of surrounding lands for money, and sucking it up for its own prosperity.

The thought process that they themselves were safe was always prevalent somewhere in them, and when it came to a situation like this, it made an environment where they couldn’t put up a decent resistance.

To Bahnseim, it was an environment where they could take what they wanted. The colors of the lords’ eyes had changed, as their horizons expanded before them…

Obligation

… Near the border of Beim and Zayin, Zayin's side had sent out forces.

The one left to the command of over a thousand troops was Creit Benini. With a neatly set hairstyle, he rode his horse on standby at the border. It was because of predictions that Bahnseim had sprung to action, and was going around looting.

But they weren't deployed to protect Beim's villages. They were there to protext Zayin territory… the people of Zayin.

Creit's subordinate rode his horse up close.

"Captain Creit!"

"What's wrong?"

"There are more people flowing in from Beim. Seems they want safe haven."

And they were also there to block the flow of people from Beim. It's not as if they were denying them. But the treatment of people in Beim and Zayin was different. That was something Beim's side didn't understand.

"Turn them back! We cannot move any further from our station."

Seeing Creit's mortified face, the subordinate raced his horse off. At first, Zayin had tried to offer relief to the people flowing in from Beim. But Beim had a particular national color. Ruled by the merchants, its armaments made of adventurers… their sense of values were too different.

The safe haven they spoke of was a request for the army to protect

their village. And as long as they paid the reward, they thought they would help.

“… We are already knights of Zayin. Why can’t they understand that?”

Unlike Creit who yearned of knighthood, the people of Beim knew little of kings and knights or the affairs of other lands…

❼

… Zayin’s temple.

There, Aura Zayin sat in an extravagant chair as the Holy Maiden. On one side sat former Holy Maiden Thelma Zayin. On the other side, the High Priest Gastone Bonini. It was a meeting-room like space with a table in the center, and before them was a merchant who held a large shop in a town of Beim.

He also had a role of something like a town chief, and he was a man who carried out commerce in a relatively large town In Beim’s northern quadrant. With Beim’s city sector the further of the two away, he had come to seek help from Zayin.

Thinking he didn’t want his status to fall below any merchant who did business with this so-called Holy Maiden, and having never traded anywhere outside of Beim, there was a problem with his attitude.

“Why is it!? We’ll pay the reward. The surrounding villages have already been attacked, and there are even some that have been slaughtered entirely! I won’t ask for thousands. Even five hundred is enough. I would like you to put out troops!”

Desperate as he was to protect his life and fortune, Aura stuck her elbow into the armrest, and rested her face on her hand. Her posture crumbled, and while Gastone condemned her bearing, she ignored.

Aura thought that disrespect should be repaid in kind, that was all.

“I understand the severity of your situation. We have dispatched

troops to our border and prepared ourselves. That's how our situation is, so we cannot spare troops for you. To add to that, if I may… there's no f***in' way in hell we're arbitrarily dispatching troops to Beim's territory! And dude… why is there a need for me to send troops for your sake in the first place?"

There, Thelma beside her came in to stop it.

"Aura! … my apologies. But please understand our standings. Crossing the border of our own accord will be to Zayin's disadvantage. People who've lost their homes have flowed into Zayin, and our situation is one where we can accept your village as well. But that's the most we can do."

The merchant unsatisfied with Thelma's explanation tapped his staff on the ground, and explained the situation.

"Why can't you understand!? Once Beim falls, they may target Zayin next! Is overlooking the barbarity of Bahnseim the will of your goddess!?"

There was some sense to his words.

If Bahnseim was left as it was, Zayin would be exposed to danger. But would saving a town and maybe a few villages in Beim's territory really change that? It would not.

Gastone opened his mouth.

"I understand your sentiment. And it is true we cannot ignore that matter. We cannot, but… the one who invited in Bahnseim's anger was Beim. What do you want to accomplish by dragging us into the mix? Do you think we can send out troops and win against an army that numbers over three hundred thousand? We don't want to make any needless attacks on Bahnseim. Please understand."

The merchant's face turned bright red.

"Then what should I do! Say you I just wait to be killed!? While singing praise to your goddess, you'll tell us to die off!?"

Aura snorted at the merchant. Of all else, the words coming out of

his mouth were right. And it was precisely that righteousness that made her laugh.

“… You sure are assertive. After making Zayin your battlefield and cash cow for so many years, it sure is different when it comes to Beim. You’re asking us to go and fight in a battle without any prospects of victory. When you’re that arrogant, it crosses into the realm of refreshing, let me tell you.”

The merchant averted his eyes from her. Perhaps everything they’d done to Zayin had just crossed through his head.

There, Thelma threw out a life boat.

“… But we cannot continue ignoring Bahnseim’s brutality like this. Then let me offer a condition.”

“A condition? What is it!? If it’s money, the amount we can prepare at a moment’s notice is…”

Thelma kept up her smile as she spoke.

“Accept the rule of Zayin. If you do, it will create a reason for Zayin’s soldiers to move. It will be to protect their homeland.”

Hearing Thelma’s words, the merchant found himself unable to open his mouth…

❼

… Before the town the pillaging force set as its next destination, the march had halted, and discussion had begun.

A tent was prepared, and the ones talking were a Baron and his vassal. A mercenary brigade chief was called out to verify the situation.

“Wasn’t that part of Beim’s territory? I can see Zayin’s flag, you know?”

The mercenary shook his head.

“Until just a while ago, it was undoubtedly Beim! And it’s across the river that marks the border. Crossing it after so long is just strange!”

Hearing those words, the Baron heard out his vassal.

“Now then, that’s how it seems to be, but… if they’re really part of Zayin, it will become something troubling.”

The vassal knight gave a belligerent opinion.

“We need only attack them. We’ve an army surpassing three hundred thousand. There’s no need for us to mind a small country like Zayin.”

However, a different vassal… an elderly knight advised the opposite.

“We should step down. We’ve country’s soldiers there. If we fight, on top of facing casualty, Zayin is a country that’s tied a pact called the Four-Country-Alliance, it seems. And what we have here isn’t an army of three hundred thousand, we only have ourselves.”

The mercenary chief spoke to the knights.

“It’s a bluff. Just attack it. And with how close that town is to Zayin’s border, it’s sure to have made a fortune.”

But the answer the Baron gave was a safe one.

“… The day we must meet up isn’t far off. It’s out of the question to be late. If it will be a lengthy battle, then we shall prioritize rejoining the main force.”

“What!?”

The mercenary chief looked displeased at his inability to pillage the town he had been counting on…

7

Having returned to South Beim, I heard the information that Bahnseim had dispersed through Beim to pillage, and moved onto the next stage of the plan.

In the meeting room, I called Miranda and Aria, having Adele-san and Maksim-san in attendance as well.

“Any requests for aid from the nearby villages?”

Adele-san shook her head.

“It’s because you made an enemy of the top brass. I don’t think the surrounding villages will request any aid.”

Aria looked a little vexed.

“Why’s that? The rumor’s already gone around.”

She seemed annoyed that she couldn’t help them, but from our point of view, there was a necessity for the people of Beim to shed some blood. Individual emotions were a separate problem. Saving them was possible. If they sought refuge, we’d accept them.

But the people of Beim wouldn’t accept that. And their movements were surprisingly dull. Miranda sighed.

“Having too much peace is something to think about. Maybe they’re dull because they still can’t believe it, or they were making light of it.”

Maksim-san folded his arms.

“… Their situation is different from Bahnseim, where they have a skirmish somewhere every year or so. Even so, close to a hundred fifty thousand soldiers aren’t pillaging, huh? Attacking their main force won’t work out.”

I didn’t plan to do so from the start, but that really was troubling. If the people of the main force remained, then the a hundred and fifty thousand moving around must be the armies of the feudal lords. Perfect to take them down one by one. The Seventh looked over the pieces laid out on the map draped over the table.

『If we move around crushing the pillaging units, the main force will make a move on us first, or they’ll send a number we won’t be able to deal with… if possible, I want to properly knock down the royal guard elites. It wouldn’t be strange if they moved anytime…』

As the Seventh waited for a movement, some Valkyries entered the meeting room. The mass-produced Valkyries all shared blue armor, and black hair. However, I could see more variations in their armor and mechanical parts than before.

Because of Damien and old Letarta, their specs were rising. The one beside that Valkyrie was Shannon who had brought tea to the meeting. Everyone was busy, while Shannon was helping out.

“These things, they’re automatons, yet they put me to work.”

Shannon directed teary eyes at Miranda. But Miranda smiled.

“Then work, Shannon.”

Shannon put the tea she’d brought in on the table.

“I ammm working! Goddess, I’m working the hell out of it!”

Swelling her cheeks in rage, she poured enough cups for those gathered before leaving. The Valkyries confirmed that everyone had seen Shannon off with a smile before speaking.

“Master, a letter from the fortress.”

“So it’s here!”

Accepting it, I read its contents aloud.

“Successful first contact. Objective: isolation… target is hurriedly seeking merits! This is it!”

In my delight, I turned a smile to Aria and Miranda.

“Let’s save the nearby villages. Aria, Miranda, and… let’s send Baldoir too! Let’s make an excuse for a merit-starved enemy to head our way. Prepare to surround them and beat down the enemy! Set up traps as well.

The Valkyries looked at me.

“What about our allies in the fortress? If we don’t inform them, there is a fear they will be drawn in.”

I didn’t even have to think about it.

“Inform them of the trap placement, and have them take a detour. If they rejoin the main force just like that, we can greatly chip down Bahnseim’s military force!”

There, Adele-san looked worried.

“… Will it really go that well? Personally, I’ll say it because I’ve met them before, but there are quite a few dangerous people.”

A worried Adele-san. Everyone in the meeting room looked at Maksim-san. There, Maksim suddenly realized something, and moved to cheer her up. In these times of cruel battle to come, I felt just a little relieved.

❼

… Redant Fortress.

There, cutting the seal on Lyle’s letter, Breid laughed before the two Baronets.

“It seems Lyle is moving because he cannot overlook this situation. Perhaps he thinks we’re panicked, as he calculated we wouldn’t be able to move very great of a force. He even politely wrote out the placement of traps.”

The two Baronets praised Breid.

“This is all because of you, captain. The knights who moved for Lyle’s plan, and that there seems to have been an effect in spreading the rumor that General Blois is trying to disperse the other generals.”

“By that rumor’s outbreak, some doubt is falling onto General Blois. I’m sure this much is enough for now. Get some achievements as royal guard captain, and if we prepare some official proof…”

Breid smiled as he held up a hand to silence them.

“You make it sound as if I’m forging evidence. It would be

troublesome if you misunderstood. The one who recommended I cross that mountain was Blois, you hear."

By Blois' plan, he had chosen mountain crossing, and that he didn't make it to the battlefield was Blois' fault, was the outline Breid had drafted out.

Eliminating the knights who made contact with the generals when they heard of a letter from Lyle, and isolating Blois. In the letter was written if it was up to five thousand, they'd be able to deal with it, and seeing that, he couldn't stop his laughter.

Breid looked at that letter marked with Lyle's ambush stations and trap placements, touching a hand to his chin.

"… Lyle's party will move, and when the feudal nobles face casualty, I will volunteer to subjugate him. Of course, you'll follow me, won't you?"

The two Baronets nodded and smiled.

"Of course. As long as you'll report our achievements to Centralle as well."

Breid swore he'd definitely honor that promise as he laughed in his heart.

(Lyle, this is the difference between you and me. You've lost your head in your schemes. I'm sure you thought all was going well, but I'm several levels above you.)

Knowing Lyle's plan, and imagining himself coming out on top, Breid was excited. Standing to prepare for his assault, he took the two Baronets along to move…

Network

… Lyle's manor in South Beim.

In a room, Monica was stationed surrounded by three Valkyries. She had drafted up a special device, and the ones she was loading it into were the first ones activated, Unit One, Two and Three. The room didn't particularly have anything in it, it was just a space needlessly wide.

With those four gathered in that room, there was a reason they were surrounding Monica like that. They opened their mouths in order One and up.

"On the Zayin front, they took in a town to their south. They went ahead to dispatch and station soldiers there."
"On the Lorphys front, they absorbed a territory to their south. There is an insufficiency of personnel to manage it. They are requesting assistance."
"The squadrons that dispersed to plunder are beginning to reassemble. However a portion of feudal lords and mercenary brigades show no signs of stopping."

The information entering from the Valkyries stationed through Beim was passing through Lyle to Monica, where it was organized. That role was being left to the three units.

The special three… the Valkyries had their abilities raised by the work of Damien and Letarta.

Because of that, they were given the rolls of host computing automatons to the system.

Monica gathered information from them, and sent the final results to Lyle. If she didn't, there was so much coming in that even Lyle

wouldn't be able to process it however hard he tried. Because of the great expanse of information, its management was left to Monica and the Valkyries.

"As expected, we can't fight them individually. Even if it's as planned, it sure is troubling. And we'll need the Lorphys front to endure. At present, we don't have the leisure to send around personnel. Tell them to dismantle Alette's unit, and instate its members as commanders. We haven't the time to keep them an elite force."

From its stream of bad luck, Lorphys aimed to make its war potential based around an elite few. However come this far it was becoming a problem. Unit One transmitted the movements of Fortress Redant.

"Movement in Redant Fortress. Entering preparations to march on Beim."

Unit Two gave the situation on Beim's side.

"By accepting refugees, the population of the city sector is experiencing a dramatic rise. No sign of a sortie."

Unit Three brought it together.

"From South Beim, Aria's unit, Miranda's unit and Baldoir's unit have each sallied forth with five hundred. They are marching towards the villages around South Beim."

Monica got their information together, before packaging it and sending it to Lyle.

"The Chicken Dickad is also preparing to advance. Let us hurry on the final checks of the scheduled destination."

While not moving an inch, Monica's group was shouldered with a vital role in this battle…

❼

… The one invading Beim's southern area was a Count House with

numbers exceeding six thousand.

However, the Count's soldiers were half of that. The remaining three thousand were made of vassaled houses and mercenaries, and those additions were attacking the villages.

Perhaps they planned to push their plundering to the limit, as there were no signs of their planned return. They were occupying Beim's south, and as there weren't any other Bahnseim lords in the area to clash with, they were acting however they pleased.

One of those units.

A few dozen men gathered under a knight house attacked a small village. Gathering the villagers in one spot as they broke into houses around, mercilessly killing whoever opposed to chip away the villagers' fighting spirit.

A man of knight standing spoke.

"It's as if they've no resistance at all. If something like this happened in my village, even the women and children would arm themselves to attack."

Another knight who'd been smiling and listening opened his mouth.

"Thus spake the man who gets chased around by his wife with a spear. But truly, like this, it feels like we're going against nothing. On top of that, the results are superb. I can't stop laughing."

Their whole force didn't reach two hundred, but to a village with only that many members itself, they were a threat.

There, a soldier came running to the gathered knights.

"M-message! There is an army headed our way! Their scale exceeds five hundred!"

The knights looked at the messenger, fed up for a moment on the words coming out of his mouth. The reason was simple. Beim didn't have any decent soldiers. And since the moment they arrived in Beim, they hadn't even caught a glimpse of an adventurer force with that scale.

They couldn't understand why they'd come out at this point in time.

"You sure you didn't mistake our allies? Is the Count's unit headed our way?"

The messenger had a desperate look on his face.

"It hoists a different flag! And where they came from is from further south!"

One of the knights stroked his chin.

"So South Beim, eh? It's been set up quite recently according to the mercenaries."

As if recalling something, another knight spoke up.

"I heard the son of the Walt House is there. Of all things, he was driven out of the Adventurers' Guild as well. It seems he performed well at Redant Fortress, but in the end all he has is a gathering of adventurers. No enemy of us… what shall we do?"

Looking around, the pile of plundered goods had yet to be loaded up. After thinking a while…

"… Retreat. They have the numerical advantage. I won't say we'll definitely lose, but facing casualty here is of no benefit to anyone. Set fire to the village at once."

He said and gave orders, but the messenger spoke.

"That's impossible! The enemy has already come all the way to…"

In the next instant, the messenger's head was pierced through by arrow, helmet and all. Why didn't you say that sooner!? Even if they wanted to shout at him, the man had already expired. The knights drew the swords at their waists as the soldiers waving a flag they had never seen before came at them on their horses.

"A cavalry!?"

Generally, Beim had a lot of adventurers turned mercenaries. Because of that, there weren't many trained in riding a horse. When adventurers used horses, it was mainly to carry loads, and come so

far, it was the first these knights had seen a cavalry force.

But one of the knights spoke up.

“That can’t be! That flag is of Cartaffs, is it not!!”

The knight in red armor pressing forward as if to cut out a path for their allied soldiers… behind them, the banners were waving, and on them were an insignia they had never seen before. A blue circle surrounded by a silver pattern. Yet some banners were the flag of Cartaffs.

Cartaffs… a land that had warred with Bahnseim for long years, and an army of a country that knew war. The knights immediately went pale. A glance at those knights brandishing their spears on their horses was enough to know they were elites.

“Retreat! Retreat at once!!”

As their allies carried on sporadic battles, the knights ran towards the place their own horses were tethered. However, the red knight who took the vanguard cut off their path.

“It’s a woman!”

The knights with swords drawn cut at the red-armored female knight. But the female knight thrust out her spear, impaling and cleaving to their demise. Once she had slain the armored knights in an instant, other horseback knights approached her.

Among them were two black-haired, red-eyes knights wearing blue armor.

“Aria-sama, a portion of the soldiers have taken flight.”

“Leave them be is the order.”

Around, the knights and soldiers of Cartaffs were still fighting the soldiers of Bahnseim, but the outcome was already determined. From a situation where Bahnseim’s side had to take on three foes per men, it grew to four and five, with the soldiers even giving up their resistance at the end.

Once she confirmed things had died down, Aria removed her helmet.

“… It isn’t the best of feelings.”

Looking at the fallen knights, Aria muttered…

❼

… Miranda led the soldiers of South Beim, rushing into their third village.

The plaza at the village’s center. There was the horses and wagons of the Baronet House she’d just fought. Sitting on a wooden box, there were two Valkyries stationed nearby.

Around her, Beim’s soldiers were cleaning up the horridly dismembered corpses of the soldiers of Bahnseim.

Miranda turned her eyes to the village chief before her. While being village chief, the man who was also a merchant using the village as his base complained to Miranda.

“Why didn’t you come sooner!? Because of you, the village has been damaged! Reimburse us! You’re paying for it!”

Miranda expressionlessly looked at the man, crossing her feet as she sat.

“W-what’s with your attitude!? Don’t you know I’m acquaintance of an influential merchant in Beim!?”

Around, the villagers were sending condemning eyes at her. But Miranda wasn’t flustered. She stood from the crate.

“This place won’t work. We’re retreating. Take all the luggage loaded here.”

There, the village chief grabbed the blue mantle of her emerald armor.

“W-wait! That’s their luggage. It’s necessary for the revival of this village! We’re the ones who faced damages! And you need to

protect us!”

Miranda grasped her mantle, and yanked it free of his grasp.

“Look out for yourselves in the future. My apologies, I’ve no interest in any of you. I’ll just say it, but I’ve no obligation to you either. Of all else, I’m a woman of South Beim. That much should be enough for you to know my meaning, right?”

The chief’s mouth opened and closed in silence. Surely he thought they were adventurers or perhaps mercenaries dispatched from Beim. No, that’s what he wanted to think.

Miranda spoke to the Valkyries.

“How’s Aria doing?”

“At present, she is headed towards her second village.”

Hearing that, Miranda sighed. She sighed thinking of how Aria-esque that was.

“She’s a little behind schedule. I’m sure she pushed herself in trying to persuade them, right? How Aria-like. What of Baldoir?”

The other Valkyrie answered.

“In battle with a marching force. He has seized victory on the plain, and will soon head towards his destination village. He is moving as ordered, but it looks like he will accomplish his objective ahead of schedule.”

Miranda sounded glad.

“How talented. I’d like to marry Doris or Lucy to him for connections’ sake, but I wouldn’t wish that fate onto anybody.”

Looking at the anxious villagers, Miranda decided to set off for her next destination at once. It wasn’t as if she left South Beim to save a small village. She was waiting for a larger target to make its move. Or perhaps to flee.

“So how is the all-important Count doing?”

On Miranda's words, the Valkyries spoke.

"It is thinkable that he has already been informed. But he shows no signs of retreat."

Miranda laughed.

"Oh my, when his number's gone down so far, he sure is taking it easy."

A Valkyrie spoke.

"It is unthinkable he has a precise grasp of the casualties. And it is doubtful he thinks of South Beim as a threat. It is not as if the Count is incompetent. It is surmised he is lacking in luck, and not overly competent."

If he fled, perhaps his life would have been spared. But if he fled and rejoined the main force, he would likely be called a coward from those around. It was because they knew that, that Miranda and co were going to make a march on that Count.

"I hope he turns out to be good bait."

Miranda put on her helmet, and made sure the smile on her face wasn't visible to those around…

❼

Make them think South Beim was a threat.

But having three hundred thousand attack us would be troublesome.

So we wanted the enemy to dispatch just enough of a scale that they'd be able to defeat us.

For that sake, there was work being done on Bahnseim's side. If that went well, I would lead our six thousand troops forth.

We'd defeat the Count plundering in the south, and have Bahnseim's army dispatch another. Doing it while the main force marched on Beim was the situation we hoped for.

Novem came to my side.

“Lyle-sama, the preparations are in order.”

Novem was carrying her staff, but she was in full armor. Clearly making her out as a magician, and having her targeted would be troublesome. Looking forward, I saw Clara wearing unfamiliar armor by Porter’s side.

“… Shouldn’t I ride a horse too? You know, as a commander.”

I complained to Novem, but she wouldn’t accept it.

“No, you shouldn’t. And you’ve lent out your horse to Aria-san. We’re lacking in goods, so please give it up.”

My shoulders dropped. From the Jewel, I could hear the Seventh’s voice.

『Well, it’s ideal if Lyle doesn’t have to move himself. If the general is gripping his blade on the battlefield, we cannot win this battle.』

A sound opinion. And I had enough achievements for soldiers to follow me even if I didn’t go out front. I didn’t have to force it.

However, the Third spoke.

『Have some rest before the target comes. Leaving things to his men is also the General’s job.』

The Fifth muttered.

『And when will he have that sort of time… No matter how you look at it, he’s busy as hell. Hah.』

Milleia-san spoke apologetically.

『… Father, don’t be so depressed. It hurts my heart. Lyle, if possible, when you have the time, I’m leaving it to you to give the Fifth a grand sendoff.』

Isn’t it because she keeps saying things like that that the difficulty level keeps going up? For some reason, I felt sorry for the Fifth.

Scant Difference

Split into three forces of five hundred.

By the actions of Aria, Miranda and Baldoir, the Count whose vassals were being attacked made his move. Unable to step down before a mere enemy of fifteen hundred, the main force was springing to action. However, the number of troops they were able to regroup into had decreased to four thousand.

Their drop in number was due to the squadrons who failed to return from plunder. Aria and the others' work had largely chipped them away.

Both sides held camps on small knolls, and as they faced one another, a field battle was about to begin. However, once our three forces merged… along with a force of my own, I stood before the enemy with our close-to-eight thousand troops, and thought.

"We're close to twice their numbers. Even so, going at them upfront will have a bit of a high casualty count."

With them being borrowed soldiers, if possible, I didn't want to injure them too much. I could tell the enemy was hesitant before a force beyond their imaginations.

If I closed my eyes, through the Fifth's… Dimension… the battlefield was displayed in my head as a three dimensional terrain map, while allies and enemies were identified with the Sixth's… Search. I really think if you use the Fifth's and Sixth's Skills together, it enters the realm of downright unfair.

But if you didn't put those skills to effective use, there wasn't any meaning.

Sitting on Porter's roof, as I thought over what to do next, the Seventh gave some advice.

『Lyle, look closely at the enemy's formation. Take in more precise information. You may be economizing with Mana consumption in mind, but the enemy's organization is something you should know.』

The first I'd angered him in a while.

"… You're right. Then Real Spec it is."

The Sixth's Third Stage Skill… Real Spec… let me gain further details on the other party. Alongside intensely increasing the info coming it, the sensation of it all flooding into my head… and by temporarily diverting the flow to Monica, she processed it, and sent it back in a way easier for me to understand.

"Basically, they have a vassaled army covering both flanks of their main House's force. Their cavalry is gathered in the center."

The Third read their movements from within the Jewel.

『Oh, if they're gathering like that… it's true that in morale, training and equipment… we have the upper hand, but perhaps they're planning to go straight for Lyle's head.』

Our saving grace was that our foe barely had any of our information. If we wanted to, we could provoke the enemies out to the center, surround them, and take them down.

The Fifth gave a serious voice.

『Lyle, call back Baldoir's unit to the center. Concentrate cavalry on both sides. Station Aria and Miranda at the flanks. Novem and Maksim by your side, and if anyone breaks through, have them clash.』

I abided his word to give orders.

"Novem."

"Yes?"

Novem nearby approached me. And once I informed her of the

Fifth's directions, she headed towards the runners.

Looking over that, the Third spoke in an intrigued voice.

『Come to think of it, it's Lyle's first time on a battlefield of this scale, isn't it?』

Up to now, I had fought in Zayin and Lorphys, but it seems the ancestors weren't satisfied with that.

When I gripped the Jewel, and Third laughed.

『Then you've got to watch properly. What happens in the case that your foe possesses a level of competence. And considerable magicians as well… it'll become flashy.』

Listening to the Third's words, I faced forwards.

❼

… When the Count mounted his horse, the surrounding elites- his vassals and soldiers- hardened their formation.

For better or worse, it was a military house, The Count at the head of it looked at the army before him.

"So we were lacking in information. To think South Beim had so many soldiers…"

To his side was a retainer knight he trusted. Similarily riding a horse, his hand held an axe… a battle axe.

"Count just by the numbers, we're at a disadvantage. Just looking at enemy movements, breaching through the center will be most difficult. In this battle, why not look up the option of retreat?"

The Count snorted, and fastened down his helmet's mask. Full plate armor, his horse wore metal protectors as well, and he was truly fully armored. One of his hands held a large sword, and through his daily training, he was easily able to hold its mass against his shoulder.

“If I did such a thing, it would tarnish my family’s name… if that’s all that would happen then so be it, but a majority of my vassals have been crushed. If we run just like that, even if I can return to the territory, the problems will remain. What vassal would follow such an unreliable lord? If it goes poorly, then they will change sides to the lords we skirmish with. ”

If only his name was on the line, he would have retreated. But the merits that would come from that wounded name, and the rumors that would spread of him not being able to avenge his vassals would make further management of his territory difficult.

“… I need the fact we did go and fight. Once we clash once, and the enemy receives light injury, escape would be most favorable.”

On the Count’s tall order, the knight also fastened down his mask and answered.

“You ask for too much. Just how much casualty would that afford us?”

The Count, in a small voice.

“If we run away, we’ll face even greater casualty. Breach the center, and once that’s over, gather up and pull out! That I moved is the important part. Please understand.”

…

“And also.”

“Yes?”

“Even if he was driven out, he’s a man of the Walt House. Don’t you want to try fighting him?”

After the knight silently nodded, the Count raised a loud voice. Holding up his large sword, and once the surrounding soldiers answered his call in kind, those cries slowly made their way to the furthest edges of his army.

“Attack!”

With the cavalry at the center, and the soldiers following behind, the armies ran to collide. The Count looked at both armies from under his helmet.

“Lyle, was it? Now how will you fight?”

The knights around him raised their left hands, and deployed a Magic Shield. To block magic, and arrows, thin as it was, it was prepared to cover a vast expanse. The army raced under that umbrella of light. It was the fundamental of Bahnseimian assault.

The knight was looking at the enemy movements. He could follow them by Skill as well, and he raised a loud voice to the Count.

“It looks like they plan to wait for us! Their flanks are moving to enclose us in! But they’re making a wide encirclement, and won’t be able to keep up with our movements!”

The Count laughed in his visor.

“Slow! Before you can do that, we’ll break through the center you thinned out yourself! Whelp of the Walt House… are you a let-down!?”

As both armies gradually drew closer, an enemy force was waiting up front.

“What? Are those golems?”

Dolls of iron were prepared with their large shields. They could see the enemy force through the gaps between metal plates, and seeing the weapons they had on hand, the Count…

“Don’t fear those swords! Prepare shields on the front line!”

Holding up their Shields, the knights directed the Magic Shield towards the front. The soldiers had been racing behind the horses from behind, but they were slowly growing further appart.

Seeing the enemy soldiers and their guns, the Count thought his men could handle something on that level, having no fear even when the gunshots rang out. However…

“W-what happened!?”

The knights at the front were sent flying backwards. A spray of blood rose, and the horse collapsed thrashing about. There was a possibility the gunshot startled them, but even for that, their movements were strange.

The count urged his own steed to jump over the collapsed horse, but following behind him, some knights failed to do so, falling to the ground when their horses legs tripped up.

“Count!”

One of the young knights who went up front had his chest shot through alongside the bang. His armor of iron had been pierced, blowing him backwards.

“Kuh! We have a chance of victory if we can approach! Attack without hesitation! Send attacks from our side!”

Unable to turn and run at this point, the knights capable of magic fired shots at the enemies before them. Fireballs, lightning, and blades of wind assailed them. But those heavy-looking golems holding their large shields in both hands had impaled their ends into the ground. Behind them hid the enemy soldiers and their guns.

When the magic hit the golems, it raised an explosion, but even if their surfaces were damaged, it didn’t go as far as to reach the soldiers behind them.

The Count looked upon the scene.

“… You mean to change war, whelp of the Walt House!”

It wasn’t a tactic that had never been used. It wasn’t as if there weren’t any other magicians capable of using golems, and such methods had been thought out. But on a financial and production front, there were too many problems that they were never fully actualized.

Both enemy and ally shot magic, and as it was blocked, he heard an incessant stream of explosion around. The count turned his eyes to

the knight beside him.

“There’s no longer any victory. But I won’t be their prisoner!”

On the Count’s words, the knight nodded.

“I shall accompany you.”

And the horse he road leapt over the golem before it, bringing its master into enemy lines.

Behind him, knight and horse crossed over the golems one after another. Among them were some unable to cross, their horses colliding with the men of iron.

And nearby a conspicuously shaped golem, they could see what looked to be the enemy commander. The armor he wore, and the knights around him… making a judgement from those, the Count held up his sword.

“This war is my loss. But I won’t let it end with that!”

At the very least, bringing him down with him. Thinking that, the Count spotted a lightly-armored man wielding a spear beside the man with white and blue armor. Around that man, sand began to gather and take the shape of armor.

“It couldn’t be… Maksim Danhel!!?”

A famous knight of Bahnseim. By the rumors, his whereabouts were unknown, but who was to think they would find him here.

The Count’s right hand knight rushed at Maksim. When he cut at Maksim’s armor of sand, the blade stuck in, and to avoid it pulling him down from his horse, he had to discard it and pull his sword.

“Your enemy is me!”

“Very well.”

As the two of them fought, the count made his way towards Lyle. Slowly drawing the sabre-like weapon at his waist, the enemy gave orders for the surrounding members to step back.

(The same sort of weapon as the current head. But like hell I'll fall short in close combat!)

Whatever the case, they were surrounded, so he would be captured afterwards. From the Count's point of view, the question was whether he could take Lyle's head or not. He thought it would make a large difference in how he evaluated himself from the world beyond.

But seeing his enemy so unflustered under this situation, he felt a bit uneasy.

When he swung his large sword at Lyle, it was turned aside by his thin and slender blade.

"You've got a nice weapon! But…!"

The Count let go of the reigns, and prepared magic with his left hand. It wasn't like he specialized in magic, but there were no absolutes in war. For that sake, he had polished just a single magic as a trump card. Perhaps because of that, the Skill he manifested wasn't an enhancement Skill, but a magic-specialized Rearguard Skill.

Turning that left hand towards Lyle, a large fireball appeared on its palm… and danced in the air alongside his left arm. The severed arm fell onto the ground, and scattered flames around it. As the enemy magicians went into extinguishing the flames, the Count looked down at his hands.

His left hand was no longer there.

"… My armor was a Magic Tool, you know. You cut it?"

Giving a sigh, the Count looked at Lyle floating in the air, and pointing his sword his way, and laughed.

"As expected, the Walt House is a gathering of monsters!"

The Count received Lyle's attack and rolled along the ground. He watched the sight of his own body straddling his horse as his consciousness grew faint…

❼

Maksim-san stuck his spear in to give the final blow to the knight who'd cut in alongside the Count.

In the chest… a single stab to the heart, and the foe spat blood from his helmet, dying with a grip on his spear.

"… I've heard his name before. A Support who had a Skill to overlook his surroundings or so. Known as the Count's right-hand man."

As Maksim-san evaluated the man, I looked around. The knights that breached through were taken out by we laying in wait.

The enemy soldiers had yet to break through the golems with Shields, and with the loss of their commander, they tried dispersing and fleeing, but Aria's force had already surrounded them, so there was nowhere for them to run.

The Count's headless body fell from its horse.

When I looked at the Katana, it was sticky with blood. Novem approached me in worry, but I couldn't take my eyes off the Count.

"Hey, why was he smiling?"

Unable to understand why he laughed to his death, and as I muttered that, Novem grasped my arm.

"It means that for better or worse, the Count was a knight. A warrior, I'm sure. Lyle-sama, if you remain too mindful of it, you'll bring unrest to your surroundings."

"… You're right."

I couldn't understand him. From the Jewel, the third let out a sigh.

『You may not be able to understand it Lyle, but there are those sorts of people out there. The sorts who'll die if they don't fight. The sorts that love war to death. They're out there I tell you!』

Is it really no good not to fight if you don't have to fight? I confirmed

the battlefield with the Skills. And I confirmed the enemy remnants fleeing around.

“… That’s fine. With this, Bahnseim can’t ignore us. I hope they give an accurate measure of our scale.”

In regards to my failure to understand, the Fifth called over.

『If looked at as individuals, there are those you’ll think favorably of. But I wonder what it is… there are people who seek battlefields. It’s different from wanting to plunder, and wanting to go wild. They just want to fight, want to enjoy fighting. In the Walt House, that trend was strong in the First, right?』

I don’t want to think the First was that sort of person. But I could picture him laughing as he charged at a strong foe.

Milleia-san spoke to me.

『Lyle, remember this. There are people with thought processes you won’t be able to understand. And to look at it the other way, there are people who won’t be able to understand us. You cannot deny them. Because it’s a fact.』

After shaking my head, I looked forward. But the Seventh…

『Looked on from the side, I’m sure we look quite belligerent ourselves. Well, I doubt I smiled to the end though.』

Wit

With the battle with the count over, we retreated to the planned point, and began our preparations.

Our main approximately ten-thousand men army need only wait for the forces of Bahnseim to come. In a tent of our camp, I looked over the words Shannon was copying out.

In the letter that came from Redant Fortress, it was written a force of small scale was coming to investigate. However, in the letter's margin…

'Around thirty thousand preparing to depart'
'The royal guard, and feudal lords close to Celes-sama are taking part.'
'A few betrayals on this side. Already disposed of.'
'Target is to defend Redant Fortress alongside unit.'

… Various things were written briefly. The target was General Blois. He was talented, and a valuable personnel uncharmed by Celes. Born to imperial nobles, and with his talent, he received too many promotions in his youth that they began treating him as a trouble maker.

By Rauno-san's investigation, the individual himself didn't strongly wish for promotion, and he just got them naturally as he completed the jobs that were given to him, apparently.

Within the tent, I returned the letter to Shannon.

"Have you gotten able to properly read them?"

She averted her eyes.

“These people have a peculiar style of handwriting and… a-around eighty percent.”

I could surmise it from looking at the characters she copied over, and it didn’t seem that was mistaken. If Shannon could read and write a little better, she’d be able to read the letters written in Mana-imbued water on her own, I’m sure.

Touching her light-violet hair, I spoke to the distracted lass.

“I do want perfection, but for now, this is enough. Good job.”

Perhaps relieved, she pat her chest. A little away, Baldoir peered at the letter, and offered his piece.

“All I can see is them writing whatever was convenient, and I can’t tell anything else.”

He was touching his chin in thought. Miranda offered him a kind explanation.

“Shannon’s eyes are special. With this, we can drag our mark onto the battlefield.”

But Baldoir’s expression wasn’t the greatest.

“Celes-sama… no, Celes’ royal guard. And the elites of Centralle, you say. Just by rumor, I’ve heard they are throwaway soldiers resolved for death. A man resolved for death is scary. When you’ve got ten thousand of them, outnumbering their foe… and the battle won’t end until one side is completely annihilated.”

Charmed by Celes. An army that didn’t fear death. It had surpassed troublesome into the realm of scary. No matter how many allies fell, it wouldn’t dent their morale.

“I’ll have the alliance and Cartaffs dispatch manpower. Even if we don’t reach fifty thousand, we’ll have more than the enemy. We have a need to annihilate them on favorable conditions, so I have gotten the preparations together already.”

I looked at the blue-armored Valkyries standing around. In a sense, those girls were also soldiers resolved for death.

Eva looked at the map, and pointed out a marked point.

“… We’ll properly do our job, but there are too many of them. We won’t be able to thin them out too much.”

I looked at her nervous air.

“If it’s dangerous, fall back. No, you only have to put them on their guard. I only want to chip away their stamina a bit, and whittling their numbers isn’t the objective. What’s important is to irritate them.”

Eva looked at me, her face twitching.

“You really are good at thinking up these sorts of means. What a foul personality.”

There, from the Jewel, the Fifth who proposed this plan…

『…!』

Reacted. Right, the one who thought it up was the Fifth, and it consisted of a night raid to put them on guard, and quite plainly drain away their stamina. We had various other plans in place to incessantly chip away at their strength.

Noticing the Fifth, Milleia-san spoke.

『Don’t worry, father. Coward is a compliment.』

There, Eva looked at me, while Baldoir fidgeted. He had yet to grow accustomed to the air around us. Or rather, he was amazed when he heard a large majority of the female camp here were my wife candidates. And it seems he was lost for how to interact with them.

“Eva-sama? Lyle-sama’s tactics are effective ones. This is for the sake of victory.”

Eva looked at him a little troubled. She likely never expected an earnest explanation. She had intended for some light banter.

Maksim-san nodded.

“I get it. I get you, Baldoir-dono. At the start, I had my troubles with this peculiar air. But it’s fine. This is normal.”

I spoke to Baldoir.

“These light exchanges are an everyday thing. You don’t need to be mindful of them.”

There Baldoir seemed even more troubled.

“That’s a bit… but if a problem comes from me opening my mouth… however my lord’s honor is at stake and…”

Looking at Baldoir, the Third in the Jewel was laughing.

『Ahaha, this kid sure is earnest. He resembles the first Randbergh who became a knight in my time. He was a bit too earnest and awkward. But I guess this is fate and such and such for you.』

The Seventh seemed to be nodding.

『The Forxuz House, and the Circry House… it’s true some have been lost, but some still remain. And the new ones Lyle gained are…』

The Seventh sounded a little glad. In order to get myself back on track, I clapped my hands.

“Now then, let’s continue the meeting. I don’t think this time’s a battle we can enjoy, but it’s one that’s definitely necessary. It carries a large significance in largely thinning Celes’ personal force.”

Right, the elites were soldiers from Centralle. If I could put a large chip in that war potential, it would make future battles easier. And if I sent death-bound soldiers at Beim, there was a possibility Beim would be completely wiped off the map.

“The war has only just begun. But if we lose here, there won’t be a next. Why don’t we strengthen our resolve.”

❼

… At Redant Fortress, Blois approached the general serving as supreme commander.

Entering the room he used, he made his enquiry.

“I would like to ask. Lyle Walt of South Beim is dangerous. Why are you sending thirty thousand troops centered on the royal guard of all things? Here, you should send fifty thousand. No, sixty thousand, or ignore them entirely and set course for Beim!”

The supreme commander spoke disinterestedly.

“It isn’t particularly a bad plan. We are heading for Beim ahead of our initial schedule. And we lost the army of one Count. Damage to our total forces exceed ten thousand. Lords who had the tables turned in their plunder aren’t few in number. On top of that, there are idiots who refuse to return after setting out to pillage. In such a state, we don’t have the leisure to send sixty thousand. So we’ll have thirty five thousand seal off South Beim’s movements. I’m sure they can do at least that much. Better than having South Beim attack us from behind in the middle of our assault on Beim.”

Blois took in the supreme commander’s words, and thought there was no mistake in them. In the end, he believed there wouldn’t be a problem even if the royal guard lost.

The royal guard and the elites… what squad would be selected to fill in the hole they left behind? The army of the eastern front returning from Beim… with their victory still fresh in memory, the supreme commander thought he could get even closer to Celes in Centralle upon his return. Or so Blois surmised.

“But in the case South Beim has war potential exceeding our expectations…”

“General Blois. It does seem there are some bad rumors spreading about you.”

Hearing his words, Blois made a vexed expression. It didn’t seem the supreme commander actually believed the rumors, but he planned to use them to refuse this talk.

“I’ve left the fortress’ defense to you. With your soldiers and three thousand from the main body, you will be commanding seven thousand, but please proceed with the utmost caution. What, as long

as you can pull off a good job, those bad rumors will fade away just like that.”

Blois left the supreme commander’s room as if driven away. Led out by the arm by the commander’s guard…

❼

… Breid supplemented the soldiers he lost in the mountains with some from the main body and feudal nobles before setting off from Redant Fortress.

His royal guard. And the elites had gone down to numbering twenty eight thousand. Two thousand had died in the mountains, or were too injured to move.

But taking in seven thousand more to reinforce his fighting force, he headed for South Beim. There were mercenary brigades among them, but they were to lead the way and nothing more.

“There are more monsters than I thought.”

On Breid’s words, the mercenary brigade chief who came to report shrugged his shoulders.

“Aren’t they going up because all the adventurers are gathering in Beim? Because those things pop up everywhere.”

Breid sought the opinion of the Baronet stationed nearby. Regardless of merit, he was stationed nearby for Breid to seek his council.

“Baronet, if we’re to disarm traps as we proceed, it will take time for our arrival. Can we push through the traps?”

The Baronet spoke without any fluster.

“That will lead to expenditure. If an army of our scale marches, it will reach their ear whether we like it or not. If it doesn’t, that means our foe is incompetent. There is no need to worry. Even if there are more enemies than reported, we have over three times their number.

There is no way we will lose.”

Breid took in that opinion, and thought.

(If we put out casualties, and keep troops lost to a minimum, there’s no way they’ll press us into a disadvantage. The reports say they don’t reach ten thousand, but our side has thirty five thousand. Normally, I’d have liked four times their forces, but if it’s for Celes’ sake, the elites have no fear of death. This ability to break through isn’t something so easily defended against. The probability they’ll go out into a field battle is low, but… we’ve prepared siege weapons as well. Even if they hole up in that south Beim place, we’ll have the advantage!)

Breid determined that if he was going to win either way, there was no need to push his forces to march on. So he decided to avoid traps as the main force proceeded forwards…

❼

… Night.

Eva led an elven clan- what’s more, a clan that lived in the forests- to approach the enemy camp camping out.

There were dark elves stationed around to protect her, and the ones swift on their feet had just returned from recon.

Wearing not black, but deep blue cloth, they had slipped into the darkness, and scouted out the enemy forces. And they were reporting to Eva.

“There’s no doubt about it. Those of the Baronet’s have put up the mark. If it’s like this, we can aim with ease, even if it be flaming arrows.”

Eva looked afar.

“I can’t see a thing.”

The surrounding elves laughed. And while apologizing to Eva…

“If we don’t use our night eyes, it’ll be a problem to our lifestyles. Unlike the clans that left the forests, our legs and eyes and bows are our pride.”

The dark elves dispersed, prepared flaming arrows, and fired them. Eva ran off protected by them, as she witnessed an arrow pierce the roof of a carriage, setting it alight.

The oil or something similar within caught light, burning up supplies.

The elves immediately extinguished the flame, and headed for a nearby forest, an arrow fired from a completely different place into where they were before.

In an instant, hundreds of arrows had been fired, showing the elves the difference in their supplies.

“How envious. They can keep firing those for so long. Even so close as we are, their aim is completely off. They’re lacking in skill.”

Eva followed so as not to fall behind anyone.

“I had a bit of confidence in myself, but you’ve exceeded that.”

There, a dark elf woman near her spoke.

“You don’t need it. Just do your best to be liked by that man. If you do, the chief said it would be linked to a rise in our status.”

It seems the reason the elves helped Eva wasn’t just because she was of the Nihil. Eva smiled having attained such determined comrades.

“Just leave it to me. Even like this, I’ve a beautiful voice. I’ll use songs to grab Lyle’s heart through the ear. More importantly, it seems the horses are coming.”

Looking behind, the knights were riding horses waving lanterns around, and inspecting the environment. But the dark elves shot arrows as they ran.

“No problem. And we’re just about to enter a forest. If we get that far, the horses are just another target.”

The knight dropped the arrow-pierced lantern, and a different arrow hit his horse, causing it to rear and throw him off.

“Not bad.”

“This much is only natural. Look, we’re entering the forest. Stay close.”

Surrounded by dark elves, Eva entered the forest.

7

… A village near Beim.

As the adventurers and soldiers wouldn’t come out of Beim, a Baronet had led his own hundred and fifty troops towards it. And now he was crumbling at the knees.

No, one hundred and fifty was a story of a few moments prior. Around the Baronet, there were only a few knights and soldiers remaining. A small girl sat atop the roof of the carriage he had brought.

And a large woman stood on the ground… with only two, they had annihilated the Baronet’s unit bare-handed.

The large woman hit her right hand’s fist against her left palm.

“No resistance at all. When you had us surrounded, that’s the best you can do?”

Surrounding them with spears, and with the support of archers, the Baronet’s soldiers had lost to just two women. What’s more, one was a little girl.

“What… what are you people!”

Even if they were close to Beim, that was looking at Beim’s territory as a whole. When the little girl jumped down from the carriage, she landed before the Baronet’s eyes.

But as she did, the surrounding knights and soldiers were blown off

their feet.

Blown away, and as they rolled along the ground, they stopped moving. On that moon-lit night, the Baronet thought he was seeing a dream. He fell onto the ground, and looked up at the girl with the full moon at her back.

“Sorry, but you all rampaged however you liked, and you don’t need anyone to hold back, right? You came all the way here just to fight… you’re already resolved for death, right?”

Seeing something sharp come out of the girl’s right hand, when she swung it, the Baronet’s line of visio took a sudden turn. And when he saw his own body collapse limp, his vision grew dark…

❼

… Once the fighting was over, May looked at the village chief who approached.

It seems he was formerly an adventurer, but lately he had gained flesh around the stomach, and perhaps he could no longer wear his old armor, as he came with his weapons alone.

“Y-you’re adventurers, right? The way you fight… you’ve got considerable skill. I beg of you! Protect our village!”

In regards to the chief’s pleas, May shrugged her shoulders. Marina didn’t have any intent to do the negotiations from the start.

(Though Marina should be more suited to this sort of thing than me.)

“Unfortunately, you’re mistaken. We’re members of Lyle’s party… former party members, I guess. We’ve been driven out by the Guild, and we just happened to pass by. But we do have business elsewhere, so we must be on our way.”

The man knew of Lyle’s name, and knew the fact he had been driven out, so he dropped his shoulders.

“I-I see. When it comes to Lyle, he’s the guy from Redant Fortress…

yeah, I don't have the money to hire such an amazing adventurer. But why did you save us?"

May folded her arms.

"Because we couldn't leave you be. But we can't protect you forever. So you're going to run. Bahnseim is raising ruckus all over the place, and most of the attacked villages have been completely annihilated."

After May said that, Marina accompanied her out of the village.

And far enough away from the villagers, May took on her quilin form and raced across the sky. Marina rode on her back looking down at the ground.

"… That boy really is thorough. If the folks we saved make their way to Beim, the rumors will definitely spread. Beim… no, the Guild and Merchants will definitely see hell."

May marveled at those actions of humanity.

"That's how Lyle does things. Humans… really are scary."

Saying that, May searched for another village under attack. May and Marina were going around saving villages being attacked by small-scale forces. Mainly to have their residents flee to Beim and spread the rumors…

The Worst Man

… The number of refugees flowing into Beim grew by the day.

Today once more, a party made its way to the strict and sturdy gate to seek help. Seeing that, a young adventurer on guard duty clenched his fist.

“Why did we abandon them!? If we went out, those Bahnseimian Cowards wouldn’t have been able to do as they pleased in Beim!”

While he was right, he was just as wrong.

It’s true there were loads of skilled adventurers in Beim. Comparing them one at a time, a majority of them of them possessed abilities exceeding the average soldier. But the adventurers who had never experienced the place called the battlefield couldn’t understand it.

The one on duty with the young lad was a forty-year-old adventurer considering his retirement. He was an adventurer without anything particularly special about him, but he had packed in various sorts of experiences.

He had stepped onto the battlefield out of a want for money, and had seen how things went there. He was told to lead some young adventurers, and the Guild had given him the role of getting a few parties together. But from that man’s eyes, the young adventurers around were complete amateurs.

They had taken on monsters in the Labyrinth. They had taken up requests and gone out to slay monsters. With only that level of experience, they truly couldn’t understand a battlefield.

It was hard when both sides had even a thousand, so when it came to a war with scale exceeding a hundred thousand… the man looked

at the young adventurers.

“What will come of dispersing our war potential? How many people do you plan on taking to save them?”

The young adventurer spoke.

“That goes without saying. As long as there’s a hundred, we’ll be able to do it. To save the villages, and turn back those Bahnseim dogs!”

From the villagers that had taken refuge in the city, they had learned the pillaging forces acted in units of a few hundreds. On the words of the young adventurer who had just heard that, the man shook his head.

“… If you go out with those numbers, you’ll just be surrounded by double that, and beaten to the ground.”

Bahnseim had greater numbers from the start. And their side had mercenaries knowledgeable on the terrain of Beim. If you thought about it normally, Beim was cornered.

But there were many among the adventurers who didn’t understand that. It was as if they couldn’t grasp that not against monsters, they were fighting against the same humans.

No, the scale was so large, they couldn’t fully process it.

“We fought our way to the twentieth floor and survived it all! Our ability is enough to take us all the way to the thirtieth. There’s no way we’d lose so easily.”

Seeing the young adventurer’s overflowing confidence, the man touched the iron helmet over her head, and pulled it down to cover his eyes.

“… Do you guys know who’s in charge here?”

There, the adventurers looked at the man.

“What? You’re telling us to do what you say? Sorry, but no matter what an unskilled adventurer says, we won’t…”

Before the young adventurers looking down on him, the man spoke.

“Wrong. I mean the guy in charge of this place. The guy above the guy above me. The one responsible for this gate.”

As the adventurers made faces that showed they didn’t understand his meaning, the man confirmed his suspicions as he resolved himself…

(Do you think we have a guy up there who’s carried out war on this scale? When our enemy’s one that wars for breakfast lunch and dinner?)

❼

… Beim’s center.

In that place where the merchants and Guild executives would gather, complaints of the villagers who’d taken shelter came in every day.

Demands to put out money for the villages that met damages were of the better sort. The more troublesome ones were the claims that they were the victims, and should thus be treated better.

They booked out most of the inns, but no matter how many rooms they prepared it wasn’t enough. If they stuffed people into unused buildings, the complaints flooded in. Within that terrible situation, the most troublesome thing of all was…

‘Why was Lyle exiled?’

Or so they protested. That he defended against a large army of monsters and pulled off what was being referred to as the miracle of Redant; it was all recent events, and fresh in the peoples’ memory.

Now Redant Fortress was so easily slipped through, and voices for them to take responsibility for these casualties piled up by the day.

The meeting room… there, they should have been carrying out discussion on how to deal with things henceforth.

But the reality:

“It isn’t my responsibility! You were the ones who agreed to his exile verdict!”
“But it’s true the South Branch forced it through!”
“And the mercenaries of the South Branch even took the initiative to invite Bahnseim in! I won’t let you say you have no responsibility in this!”

The South Branch executive was being condemned by the other executives and merchants in attendance. If they heard the ones guiding Bahnseim were mostly mercenaries of the South Branch, anyone would want to shout at him.

And day after day, these meetings would never get on track.

“Now isn’t the time for such things! We need to think up how to deal with Bahnseim at once!”
“The refugees who entered the city are going to raise a rebellion before they even get here. So we have a need for someone to take responsibility for it!”
“I heard they’re pillaging around. Why not sent ten to twenty thousand out for relief?”
“Who will lead them? And Bahnseim’s army has already reassembled, and begun its march on the city.”

As their meetings didn’t go anywhere, their response was delayed. In order to protect their trade enterprises in the city of Beim, the merchants didn’t want to send soldiers out.

The Guild had its face, so it wanted to send out adventurers to assist the residents of Beim’s territory.

Opinions were divided, and at the end of every meeting, the same line would come out…

“… Why don’t we send an envoy to South Beim? If we use sea routes, Bahnseim won’t be able to do anything about it.”

Voices to seek out Lyle’s aid were rising and when their own positions finally began to feel dubious, it flowed towards seeking help from South Beim… from Lyle.

But anyone in Beim understood. They were the ones who exiled the boy, and from the eyes of a third party, Lyle was completely the victim.

The merchants starting up new enterprises in South Beim had been exiled from the city themselves. Just by asking for help, would help really come?

And the most important thing was…

“Even if we seek their help, South Beim doesn’t have that amount of troops. And what will they demand in exchange?”

The one who watched this repeat every meeting was the East Branch’s executive’s guard Tahnia. The head of the East Branch… Tahnia’s superior spoke.

“This situation is dangerous to South Beim as well, so there is a possibility they will cooperate. No, perhaps I should say there was one. Now that we’ve come so far, they won’t make it in time.”

Tahnia to her superior.

“Is it no good to give him reinstatement and favorable treatment from the guild alongside an adequate reward?”

The superior laughed a bit.

“Will that man move for something like that? Tahnia, what does the Tanya who manned the receptions desk think?”

Tahnia thought a bit before shaking her head. Her silky black hair that extended to her shoulders swayed.

“… It’s not happening. No matter what you present to him, I can’t say for sure that Lyle will save Beim.”

Her superior nodded. To such a meeting room, a notice came in. A Guild personnel out of breath violently threw open the door.

“With an army of approximately ten thousand, South Beim has crushed the forces plundering Beim’s southern regions!”

It was better news than Beim could have wished for…

7

… Breid was irritated with the attacks that came every single day.

When night came, he would suddenly hear loud noises. The neighs of horses, and the clashing of metal. The toll of the bell. On top of that, with the attacks under the cover of night, they were facing a shortage of supplies.

It wasn't like they didn't have enough to get through the journey. Looking at it as a whole, it was a trivial matter. But the soldiers' exhaustion was accumulating by the day.

The Baronet was on horseback, lined nearby Breid. Breid sent a glance towards him.

"Is Lyle's party really unprepared for this?"

To his voice lightly mingled with uncertainty, the Baronet answered boldly.

"It's the opposite. Before these numbers, without any proper methods to choose, he can only carry out this sporadic harassment. I'm sure you'll face casualty if you lower your guard, but it doesn't sway the outcome of your inevitable victory. They just don't have any other means. If they did, they'd have attacked us a long time ago."

Breid thought.

(It's true there's a sort of sense to his words. If they could attack, then they haven't. And they're only going to the level of harassment.)

"Understood. I'll increase the number on watch during the night."

Raising the night watch even further was Breid's countermeasure for Lyle's harassment…

7

… Night.

Seeing the increase in guards, Eva thought a bit.

The elves around her… the harassment squad awaited her orders. The dark elf woman called over.

“Now then, what shall we do, princess?”

Eva was surprised.

“Wait, what’s with princess?”

“Of the Nihil trive. And our shining star of hope. Being a princess isn’t so bad, right?”

Eva thought that was a little off, as she stuck out her chest, and put a hand on the large breasts that came out with it.

“Stop it with princess. Right, let’s go with songstress. Best songstress in the world.”

She had intended it as a joke, but the dark elves all at once…

“Understood, songstress.”
“Songstress, huh. You sure are grandiose, songstress.”
“Well, ‘s long as you’re an elf, perhaps that’s the better one, songstress.”

Before the elves who earnestly tried to make songstress a thing, Eva shook her head. Her expression was a little embarrassed.

“I’m sorry. That one was a joke, so stop it there. That was my bad.”

There, the dark elf woman spoke to her.

“Now then, what shall we do today, songstress? Make a loud voice or sound with your Skill? Or perhaps an assault with arrows?”

Seeing that the songstress wasn’t going anywhere, Eva lowered her shoulders. She spoke to the dark elves.

“… With the enemy numbers, that’s enough for today. I think we’ve harassed them plenty. Let’s proceed ahead, and get some rest.”

“You sure?”

“It doesn’t matter. Lyle did say to make some moderate space at times to make them feel safe. It seems that way is more effective.”

Eva’s squad’s harassment was gradually exhausting Bahnseim’s army…

❼

As we lay in wait for Bahnseim’s army, preparations were underway while we held a meeting with the forces that joined us.

The forces that joined us were the main body from the alliance. A portion of them didn’t know of Bahnseim’s movements, so they wouldn’t part with valuable war potential.

However, as Bahnseim was setting Beim alone as its target, the forces that were sent were able to quickly arrive be sea. Mainly due to the hard work of the Trēs House’s and other merchants’ ships.

Letting her silver hair sway as she approached me was black-clad Gracia-san. No, Gracia. She was making a bit of a stern expression, but once I directed a smile, her pale skin was flushed.

“I’m happy we could meet, Gracia.”

I spread out my arms, and embraced Gracia once she had nervously made her way towards me. It was to indicate my existence and standing to those around. Something extremely favorable for me.

But Baldoir who’d met up with us recently opened his eyes wide. Beside him- while he wasn’t assigned to educating him- Maksim-san explained various things.

“Maksim-dono, just how many women has Lyle-sama enclosed in his camp!?”

“Calm down, Baldoir-dono. He hasn’t enclosed them. They’ve enclosed him. Make sure not to be rude. Of all else, she’s putting out a considerable number of troops. Her country is lending out ten thousand, the same level as Elza-sama of Rusworth. ”

Within the alliance, the ones giving out ten thousand were Galleria and Rusworth. Zayin was lending eight thousand, while Lorphys lent six thousand. While their scale was the smallest, that was because they couldn't find the personnel to spare for it.

An army of thirty four thousand had amassed in South Beim.

For Cartaffs' soldiers, even if I had just made use of them, nine thousand were fit to move. That forty three thousand on top of my own forces and South Beim… we were in a state where we could move around forty five thousand.

While I was only holding Gracia-san lightly, the large sensation of her chest was…

『Lyle, getting a big head won't set a good example to follow. Keep it together. If you aren't yet used to women, then just put in a quick word to Miranda, and she'll take your virginity away at once…』

Milleia-san pretended to give advice as she strongly advocated for Miranda. But the Fifth's opinion was different.

『Okay, let's ignore her. Settle on Novem or Aria. Those two won't light a spark for their surroundings, so they're relatively safe.』

The one who opposed that opinion was the Third.

『Whoa, it would be troublesome if you forgot my number one Clara-chan. Aria-chan isn't bad, but her personality can't lie. It's a given that the information will leak from her… here, you should settle for Clara-chan or Novem-chan!』

But the Seventh wrung out his voice.

『You fools. This is all linked to the vital issue of legal wife! Lyle take some measures with Ludmilla or Lianne.』

Just what is this. Their opinions don't align at all. The early days were the same, but the opinions in the Jewel never coincided.

I separated from Gracia, and spoke as her face reddened.

"Please lend a hand to me again, Gracia."

There, mindful of surrounding eyes, Gracia stroked her hair.

“Leave it to me. I’ll swing my spear for your sake. T-that’s… as your woman, it’s my…”

Once she had said that much Elza hastily burst onto the scene. In contrast to Gracia, she wore white clothing. And her light-blue hair granted a cold impression around.

I offered Gracia my thanks before turning to Elza.

“I was waiting for you, Elza.”

“Y-yes! I wanted to come in a hurry, but my retainers wouldn’t allow it. However, now that I’m here, you can be relieved.”

When she opened her arms and hugged me, Baldoir spoke up again.

“… Lyle-sama, I’d like to think not, but could it be…”

Maksim-san let out a dry laugh.

“How about it. Isn’t he amazing? … It’s our saving grace there are so many female rulers in our time. Lyle-dono is amazing. He can take down whatever prey he aims at without fail. I’m worried for Adele-sama, so I never let them stay alone in the same room, mind you.”

Baldoir looked seriously into Maksim-san’s face.

“It couldn’t be that Lorphys and Zayin are…!”

“Unfortunately…”

When Maksim-san said unfortunately, Baldoir looked relieved. However Maksim-san’s further words made him hold his head.

“… Zayin is a work in progress, rather even I don’t know what’s going to happen there. By rumor, it seems he has relations with the current and previous generation of Holy Maidens. And Lorphys’ royal princess was refused by Novem-dono. Isn’t that nice? I don’t know what’s all this about precepts, but it seems all the ones but Lorphys have cleared the conditions.”

Baldoir muttered.

“… The Walt House family precepts, is it? Certainly, as long as they’ve cleared them all, and Novem-dono of the Forxuz House recognizes that, there shouldn’t be any doubt about it But there’s definitely going to be a problem with succession… just like in the generation before the one before mine… father, what shall I do….”

Why is it… it’s starting to become intriguing to observe Baldoir’s reactions. Should I just introduce him a few as well? Or so I began to think.

Dead Men

… While avoiding the maintained roads, Breid managed to march his army all the way to the destination point.

But when he finally thought he was growing closer to South Beim, what he saw was more than forty thousand enemies ready and waiting.

The battleground was set for noon, and the elites and soldiers scraped up from the feudal lords were in the midst of total exhaustion. By the daily attacks and loud noises, they weren't able to get any satisfactory rest. Their horses had been set free, so to carry their supplies, they had to put humans on the job, causing even greater exhaustion.

Within that situation, Breid looked around himself. The two Baronets who had approached him at Redant Fortress… and the knights they got to follow them. Before he had realized it, they had stuck on a reason, and withdrawn from the force, unit and all.

The worst of it was that they had taken off with valuable supplies. Arrows on top of spare equipment. But still, it wasn't to a level where they were incapable of battle. More than that, Breid had enough power to overturn this numerical disadvantage.

For these soldiers he brought along were the elites who had sworn absolute loyalty to Celes. These men would easily throw down their lives for her sake.

With a numerical difference of this level, and even this great disadvantage, they had enough perseverance to easily break through. However, there was something Breid couldn't forgive.

That ascending the incline, on the defenses above solidified like a

fortress, stood Lyle looking down over them in blue and white armor.

“… So you set this up! You tricked me… you!!”

Breid’s anger was immense. More than that the Baronets had betrayed him, he couldn’t forgive that he was dancing on the palm of Lyle’s hand. The reason being that to Breid, Lyle was his detested idol of loathing itself.

Just the thought he was from a Count House made him detestable. What’s more, hearing he was a driven-out incompetent, he ridiculed him within. But he had defeated a Gryphon, and acted as if he had no interest in that achievement. He had conceded the merits Breid was dying to get his hands on.

It felt as if he was just being tossed the leftovers… no, it was fact that Breid had gotten his current status by chance. By chance, he had stabbed the knight Celes failed to kill from behind.

His black armor was the armor that knight wore over his body. That gallant knight who swung about his spear on his horse… the knight Breid aspired to be. Out of a desire to be closer to that knight, he had fixed up the armor and draped it over himself.

Wearing that armor with a contrastive coloration to Lyle’s, Breid extended a hand to the hilt of his sword. He was tired, but with the enemy before his eyes, his fighting spirit didn’t fall short from that of the throw-away elites.

“You incompetent washout!! Captain of the royal guard… Breid Vamper will teach you what it means to be a true knight! Attaccckkkk!!”

There was no such thing as a plan. Breid chose to simply charge at the enemy before his eyes. But that itself was the fighting style with the highest possible rate of success at these elites’ disposal.

“Chaaaaarrrggeee!!”

Everyone reached for the medicine concealed in their pouches… opening the lid, they all chewed up and swallowed the solid masses

within…

❼

At the defensive lines we prepared for emergency's sake, our arrows bows and magic were overcome by the soldiers, who successfully breached the first wall.

The scene of over thirty thousand attacking was quite a masterpiece, but now wasn't the time for that. I looked upon it as I mutter.

"What… just what's going on with them!?"

The soldiers who joyfully leapt in front of the loaded guns. Using those soldiers as shields, the ones in the back pushed their way to the wall, and stuck themselves to it. Pierced with spears or cut with swords, it looked as if the only thing on their minds was to breach this wall.

Not dying so easily even with fatal wounds, they gripped the soldiers on our side, making an opening for their allies. They broke into a fighting style that easily sacrificed their comrades.

I couldn't call their perseverance anything but abnormal.

"… Do they know no fear?"

The unit stationed at the front was attacked by the enemies that breached the wall bloodstained as they were. What's more, they were all laughing as they fought.

From the Jewel, the Fifth clicked his tongue.

『Che… Lyle, have the forces step back. This is worse than I thought.』

They were more dangerous than the Fifth had anticipated. I had the forces retreat. To create an opening for that, I sent those two out.

"Have Gracia and Elza step out. Don't let the soldiers get close by any means! Just blow them away!"

Originally, I planned to have those two come out when the enemy had been stalled at the wall, but I instead, we were going to make some time for the front force to retreat.

Riding their horses, they lead their own battalions at their flanks to provide relief to our allies. When they fired their magic at the enemy, soldiers were sent flying through the air.

But an enemy that wouldn't stop even upon witnessing that scene. They were deploying a Shield through magic to keep casualties down, but they didn't show any fear to the magics that easily burst through it.

Soldiers burned through by Gracia's pale flames. Jumping over the opened gap, the others let their bodies be clad in flames as they pressed on.

The enemy soldiers frozen by Elza's ice… the soldiers pressing behind paid them no mind as they shattered them underfoot.

Just press forward… just kill the enemy before your eyes… before the enemy force with that mindset, I clenched my fist.

They were supposed to be exhausted, yet this force that wouldn't stop their assault even come night. Normally, we were supposed to have an overwhelming advantage, but we were being psychologically cornered.

7

Night.

While the front line was still fighting, I stepped back a bit, and gathered all the main members.

Within the tent, I sought the opinions of those who had actually witnessed the force of our foe.

"Even with our greater numbers, we're being pushed back. The enemy's casualties are greater than ours. But we're losing

psychologically. I want to do something about it."

Hearing that from me, Maksim-san folded his arms.

"I've clashed with the enemy soldiers a few times. But those really are dead men. For an army as large as thirty thousand to attack resolved for death… it may overturn our numerical and terrain advantage. The enemy casualties haven't reached ten thousand yet, and even if it does, their hearts won't fold. If we put out any more casualty before that…"

Our hearts would be the first to break, though Maksim-san didn't say it through to the end. Everyone who'd been out on the battlefield understood it. I had prepared thinking they were an army with the power to overcome, but I never thought they would be that abnormal.

No, if it was mere abnormality, that wouldn't be a problem, but all their soldiers were undoubtedly elites with a certain level of ability.

Having defeated many enemies, Gracia made an unmerry expression.

"Are all Bahnseim's soldiers something like that? That's plain bizarre. Without even thinking of the deaths they suffer, for them to simply press forward…"

Elza shared her opinion.

"I can understand when someone knows this is where they will die. But it truly is abnormal to be able to accomplish it with those numbers. Celes, you called her? She really is dangerous."

I tried thinking over what Celes had done to those elites. It's true dead men were a threat. But I couldn't understand how it brought about such an aptitude to break through.

There, Monica entered the tent.

"Pardon me. Chicken dickwad, there is something I need to inform you of."

"What?"

I looked at Monica. She straightened her back, and spoke without any of her usual jokes.

“… About the soldiers on Bahnseim’s side, it has been determined they have ingested a sort of drug. Result of analysis shows it is something that puts them into an excited state. Magic analysis is out of my expertise, but according to Professor Damien there is a possibility it’s bestowing them a pseudo-Skill effect.”

Everyone’s eyes opened wide. Even in Beim, I’d never heard such a medicine existed. And if such a convenient drug existed, every country out there would be seeking it out.

But Monica spoke.

“At the same time, its design has a toxic nature. It is thinkable that they aren’t displaying more than ten to twenty percent of the Skill, yet after use their bodies won’t be able to adapt to it, and will perish as a result. There is a high probability monster materials are being used as ingredients.

I’ve heard of monster materials being used in medicine before. But by Monica’s tone, they were using things not meant for medicinal purposes, and conducting war by shortening lifespans.

I witnessed Novem’s expression warp as she grit her teeth.

“… How long until they die? A day or two?”

Monica shook her head.

“No, at the very least, it will take three months. Soldiers set to die is exactly what they are.”

From the Jewel, I heard the Third and Seventh’s voices.

『… She’s really done it. Who the hell goes that far? Her elites were to be thrown away.』

『To plan to kill off thirty thousand of your soldiers from the start…』

The Third’s voice was lower than usual, and scary. The Fifth seemed

to be thinking over something as he spoke to me.

『Lyle, make a bit of time. It'll end at once.』

Milleia-san raised a surprised voice.

『Father!』

The Fifth spoke.

『Don't stop me. Now is the right time… it seems a meaning has come to my way of life.』

❼

… A ship from Beim arrived at South Beim.

It was a ship managed by the Trēs House, and the ones aboard were Roland and Gina. Those two that brought a Guild executive from Beim had come to seek reinforcements from South Beim.

In the Trēs Manor prepared in South Beim, Fidel and Vera were carrying out negotiations with the three.

They sat across a table, each side seated. Roland and Gina were lowering their eyes, while the executive frantically explained the present situation.

"Fidel-dono, Please rescue Beim from its current predicament. That lovely lady said she was Lyle-dono's lover, did she not? This is a chance for the Trēs House to return to Beim!"

The other party promised reinstatement as an adventurer, preferential treatment, and a great sum of money if Lyle came to offer relief to Beim. At the same time, they said they would revoke the Trēs House's exile sentence from the city.

Vera stayed silent. But Fidel was different. He dealt with them smiling.

"That sounds nice. If we return to Beim, we won't even be comparable to what we were before, but we'll have a more stable

stronghold than what we have here. It will be easier to do business."

Seeing Fidel smile, the executive smiled in kind. But Fidel's face turned serious.

"… But just returning the status I lost in Beim holds no meaning. The merchants I've dealt with over my long years, and the customers have already moved far away. You say you can bring everything back to how it once was?"

"T-that would be difficult. But we will put the utmost effort towards–"

"—It goes well without saying you'll be applying yourselves. And so? Did you plan to be evaluated on such an obvious fact?"

As he troubled the other party, Vera looked at Gina and Roland and opened her mouth.

"… I heard rumor at the harbor. You've both been abused quite well by your surroundings. What were you trying to do by making the Trēs House's scale average even in Beim?"

Gina in regards to her.

"Do you want to be number one that badly!? I didn't want to marry someone I didn't even love to maintain that! I just wanted to live with Roland in a house that fit his stature!"

Vera replied.

"Can you really say those words to the ones working under you? You're already in a position where you have to protect the ones working for your House!"

"C-could the two of you put that on hold?"

The executive soothed Gina, and spoke to Fidel once more.

"We don't have any more time. I would like to call Lyle-dono back. Beim is in need of his power."

Fidel placed both elbows on the table, and folded his arms to conceal his mouth.

“… Sorry, that’s impossible.”

“Fidel-sama!”

Roland stood forcefully. Are you fine with your homeland of Beim engulfed in flames? Or his eyes seemed to chastise. But he had enough rationality not to put that to words.

Fidel held in a laugh.

“Hmph, I don’t have the right to decide. This isn’t Beim. Everything is managed by that brat here. And his current representative is…”

“… Pardon my interruption.”

With her pink hair fluttering, a woman surrounded by black-haired maids opened the door, and entered the room. The woman stood before the three, and gave her greetings.

“The management of South Beim has been left to me; I am called Lianne. My surname… will eventually become Walt, so there is no use in saying it.”

Fidel turned to the Guild executive.

“This place doesn’t follow the same rule as Beim. So no matter how hard you plead to me, it’s impossible. But I’ve prepared your opportunity. Why not try making your case here?”

Fidel and Vera stood from their seats, while the maid-clothed Valkyries seated Lianne before the three visitors. Lianne leaned forward and smiled.

“We’re wasting time, so let’s get to it. Now then, just how much do you plan on doing for us?”

The executive, panicked as he was.

“A-as I’ve just stated, Lyle-dono’s reinstatement as an adventurer, and–”

“—Rejected. Why would we want adventurer status at this point? It’s a problem that comes even before negotiations. Now return at once, and tell them… to give us everything. Money and status, fame and

land and authority! Give us everything, and next time you come, have everyone here to kneel before Lyle Walt. Do you understand? Now off with you. We're not going to negotiate. Either accept our conditions, or reject them and perish. Choose whichever one you like. We're fine if Beim is destroyed. More so, it would be better for us if it did. I mean… you're the ones who drove him out in the first place, aren't you?"

While the executive attempted to say something, Roland spoke to Lianne.

"We understand that. So Beim will promise the maximum reception and…"

Lianne leaned her back into her chair.

"… If that's the maximum, then Beim isn't anything special. If you can't protect yourselves, then fall. You can't get by in the world so easily. The weak will collapse. Underestimating the surroundings, failing to get their cooperation, and betraying your old allies, it's all your peoples' responsibility. And all is over once the responsible parties take responsibility."

Before Lianne's smile, the three abandoned hope of any further negotiations…

Merciless Blade

… Atop the wall enclosing Beim, there were soldiers firing arrows.

But before Bahnseim's army that surrounded them on all sides but the port, even if they had the bows and guns, they couldn't get in any decent attacks.

When it came to magic attacks, it felt like Beim was the one pushing. The skilled magicians among the adventurers shot off their prided magics one after the next. And Bahnseim could only endure, occasionally sending magic counterattacks of their own.

If things continued like this, would Bahnseim eventually be blown to magical bits? Beim's morale experienced a slight recovery.

The leader of a large adventurer party taking command at the scene fought boldly where Bahnseim's offense was the greatest.

"Let's show these dogs of Bahnseim! The monsters we take on every day are scarier than they!"

That wasn't wrong. But it was a statement forgetting who they should fear more.

As his party members shot one magic or arrow after the next, Bahnseim incurred. Deploying a Magic Shield, they were giving their utmost effort just to ward off the attacks… or so it seemed…

❼

… Headquarters of Bahnseim's Beim Invasion Force.

In it, the generals gathered, hearing the explosions and feeling the

shockwaves as they held their meeting.

Not a single one of them stood fearful before Beim's intense assault. More than that, they even showed their leisure.

The Supreme Commander opened his mouth.

"Now then, this Beim lot is showing its mettle, but I'm sure we can go at it the usual way. Because if we just wait here, the enemy will exhaust themselves."

One of the generals spoke up.

"The boats are prepared to attack from the sea. They're plunderers that took a village with a coast, and it will take a little time before they are used to it."

The Commander nodded.

"Let them get some firm training in. It's better than rushing and taking a tumble. Our larger force need only put pressure on the enemy from here. Seeing us not crumbling no matter what they do, just how long will it take for Beim's heart to fold in…"

A knight brigade chief reported the surrounding situation.

"Beim supposedly took in a considerable number of refugees from the surrounding towns and villages. I'm sure they have enough food, but can they hold out with so many mouths to feed… and they've never experienced a war of this scale before. They may be surprisingly fragile."

Beim had used its mercenaries to intervene in war for its own prosperity, but the city itself had never fallen into a position where it had to experience war firsthand. There weren't any leaders among them who'd experienced battle on this scale, and Bahnseim's side was aware Beim had yet to think up any effective means.

No, they could feel it in their bones.

"They should've sought out a retired general, and invested their money into getting his teachings. I can't understand why Beim won't take such a simple measure."

The one to answer the Supreme Commander's question was a young general.

"Were they making light of it all? Even if they intervened in wars around, a majority of them were on a smaller scale. From what I've heard of the pillaged villages, they're putting too much trust into the abilities of the adventurers. Do they think each one is a match for a thousand?"

Adventurers who took on monsters… the people of Beim were largely mistaking their abilities. The merchants running businesses out of Beim were the same.

One of the generals laughed.

"Match for a thousand, eh? 'Twas what I wanted to be when I was a wee lad. But reality 'sn't so sweet. There's not an incompetent here who'd force the whole burden to a man with such skill to his blade, Supreme Commander."

Battle reliant on a single exceptional, to say it the other way, as long as that one was lost, they would crumble too easily.

If the adventurers were the strong of Beim, they need only wait for those adventurers' hearts to cave in. The Supreme Commander smiled lightly.

"That right. Well then, will Beim's heart fold first, or will the plans we prepared be pulled off first? Taking bets here, gentlemen."

The generals of Bahnseim raised bursts of laughter…

7

Late night.

Stepping back a bit, I lay down gripping the Jewel. I had ate, wiped down my body, and when I entered the bed, I closed my eyes. We had taken measures in advance. May should be prepared as well. I felt the sensation of my mind entering the Jewel, and when I next opened my eyes, I was in the Jewel's round table room.

The one waiting for me was the Fifth, who was sitting on the table. He was making a serious expression.

『So you've come. Follow me. I'll teach you my Skill, and hand you the weapon necessary for this situation. Take up my galient blade. Bring an end to this detestable battle at once.』

The Fifth's Skill Map… it was a Skill to grasp the surrounding terrain. I'd given a bit of thought into why he came out with such a Skill.

The First's enhancements. The Second's Skill to let others use your Skills. The Third's was for the psyche. The Fourth's for movement… and the Fifth gained the ability to grasp his surroundings.

I thought the reason he needed it lay in the situation at the time. Bandits were storming into the Walt House's territory and wreaking havoc at the time. Rather than the Sixth's Skill to search out enemy presences, the Fifth's needed his terrain understanding to set up defenses and predict enemy invasion routes.

As he hopped down from the table, and headed off for his room, the Third and Seventh saw him off from their seats. When the Fifth sent them glances, they both nodded.

But sitting in the Fifth's chair, Milleia-san didn't look fully satisfied. No, I'm sure she understood. Insisting to give him a grand sendoff wasn't important in our current predicament. She stood.

The Fifth looked at her.

『Milleia… don't stop me anymore.』

『I won't stop you. But won't you be lonely alone?』

There, the Fifth shrugged his shoulders.

『I'm not alone. There's already someone waiting in my room.』

Milleia-san shook her head, and muttered something like, 'there really is no helping you'. As me and Milleia-san headed for the Fifth's room, I could hear the Seventh's voice.

『… Aunty.』

To his worried eyes, Milleia-san smiled and waved.

『No need to worry, I won't get in his way anymore. And Brod-kun… that part of you hasn't changed either. Makes me remember the past.』

Remember what? That was something only Milleia-san and the Seventh would understand. I rounded the doorway, and entered his memories.

❼

Ashen clouds covered the sky, a battlefield where rain might fall at any moment.

No, the battle was already over. There were corpses fallen around, and the bodies presumably from the Walt House were carefully being handled. In contrast, for the enemy fully armored self-proclaimed bandits- owing to the possibility there may be some playing dead- the Walt House soldiers were going around stabbing in their spears.

But there were many tattered bodies around, enough that it even made me curious as to how they were killed. The Fifth looked at Fredricks, who was sitting in the chair taking a glance at the bandits.

The surviving ones were stripped of their equipment and bound with rope. They were brought before Fredricks, where they cast their eyes down.

"… Fifth, are these people bandits?"

The Fifth laughed a bit.

『Self-proclaimed bandits. In truth, they were one of the Walt House's vassals, and the folks they let in from the territory they neighbored. They used the vassals as a bridge to lay waste to my territory. And they only called themselves bandits whenever they were running amok. Well, lords are little different from bandits, is how the saying goes. You can see why. In the battle, the guys of Bahnseim pillaged

their hearts out, right? That's something you can find anywhere. It's nothing rare.』

When I made an unpleasant face, the Fifth and Milleia-san laughed. It didn't look like they were making fun of me, they were truly glad. The Fifth nodded.

『That's how it should be. That feeling is important. Though I've forgotten it.』

『Father.』

The surrounding scene began moving. One of the presented bandits was a tag-along of the noble boy who once made fun of Fredricks. He had grown into a young man, but now he was being presented to Fredricks as a bandit, kicked around by the surrounding soldiers.

『B-bastards! Don't think you'll get off lightly for doing this to me. We may have lost here, but once I return home…』

I tilted my head.

"Home? He planned to return from that?"

While I couldn't believe it, Milleia-san explained.

『At the time, the surrounding lords were conspiring. Though that was gone by the time we grew up. Based on how things went, we'd have to take him to Centralle, and use him as a witness in the king's arbitration. No, as evidence I should say.』

"It was gone? The reason it didn't continue was…"

The Fifth spoke in an emotionless voice.

『Because I thoroughly destroyed that rule. An outskirts-specific rule. You'll find it elsewhere, but to summarize, it was mediation. Between nobles, I'll add on. Those guys were treating it as some form of game.』

I harbored some unpleasant feeling towards the bound young man that came out in the Fifth's memory. Milleia-san read my emotions, and nodded.

『… By Walt House's rule, all bandits were to be executed. Decapitated. The corpses hung up and made an example of.』

A soldier carrying a large axe stepped out in front of the bandits. The young man gave a voice as if he couldn't tell what was going on.

『S-stop! I won't crumble under your threats! If you do that, a war will break out with the Walt House!』

The vassal nobles who pillaged with the young man were the same. Their expressions had changed from brazen to hurried.

『Please stop it! If you do it, there really won't be any going back… w-we swear never to do anything like this henceforth!』

What an unsightly scene. I couldn't even laugh at it. But the Fifth was laughing a little.

『Terrible right? That was the state at the time. Thinking the area's rule was absolute, they had done it believing there was no risk at all. There were various causes and factors, but mainly because there weren't any foreign threats at the time. If there were, it was at skirmish level. The Third had done too good a job in threatening that war-loving half-wit, it ushered in an extreme change of course for the country. These guys were bored, pretty much. They should've just quieted down and focused on developing their territories.』

Fredricks stood from his seat, and pulled the sword at his waist. There was a trigger-like thing on the hilt portion. Lines ran across the blade, and that peculiar sword… the galient blade showed off its form.

『I can't hear a word you're saying. The ones here are bandits. I can't see anything else. You'll present your necks here. And also. I'll be crushing a vassaled house of mine. If they have a complaint, I'm sure a certain someone's son will go crying to Centralle. That a father playing sham-bandit was slain by his lord!』

Fredricks used his sword. With a swipe to the side, its blade moved like a living animal hunting out the heads of the vassal's knights and soldiers. Heads fell one after the next… The sword they turned red from the blood it took in went limp like a whip, before returning to the

Fifth in its sword shape.

The bound bodies of bandits around spurted blood as they fell. Seeing that scene, the young man burst out.

『S-stop iiit!! You won't get your hands on any ransom! But with me, you can at least get a few hundred gold from…』

The young man screamed, and while he was bound, he frantically writhed to flee. His own remaining soldiers were watching his pitiful plight. Fredricks held up his blood-reddened blade as he stepped on the man's back to pin him to the ground. The galient blade touched his neck.

『I don't need something like that. How much money do you think it takes to set up a single village?』

『T-then I'll rebuild this village! I'll make it how it was before! It was a small village. It wasn't anything special, but my House will put out money to reconstruct it! Don't get so angry over a single small village! O-or are you still angry about the past? Then I'll apologize. I'll give a formal apology! So sheath your sword!』

A single small village… its yearly tax yield wouldn't even reach a hundred gold coins. Even if you let it be, its population would increase, and it would begin cultivating so it could support itself. To the young man, that's all a village was, it seems. He had a different way of thought than the one fostered in the Walt House.

Fredricks spoke.

『I see. So you'll make this village just as it was before.』

『S-so you understand? Then…』

『Then how does this sound. Without the slightest bit of difference, bring it all back. Revert the buildings and tools you burned, and bring all the villagers back to life. If you do, I don't need a ransom. I don't have any interest in the past. I'll send you back to your beloved home at once. Now have a go at it!』

The young man opened his mouth in silence.

『D-don’t screw with me! There’s no way I can…』

His head flew through the air. The face of the young Fredricks who swore his revenge was terribly grim. Fredricks parted from the man before wiping off the blood stuck to his blade. And he spoke without any interest.

『Kill them all. Make an example of their bodies. Skewer them and position them so his house will notice. If that leads them to invade, we’ll retaliate.』

He was indifferent. That he continued checking the mechanisms of his weapons, that rather than the ones he had killed, he was making sure it wasn’t broken anywhere was because he truly was more interested in the sword. The soldiers with axes headed for the knights and soldiers calling themselves bandits, and I could hear screams.

Milleia-san sounded a little tired.

『Back then, father really was cruel.』

The Fifth, quietly.

『… I couldn’t think of any other means. No, I didn’t want to think of them.』

Within the scene, there was a group approaching Fredricks. The villagers.

『… Fredricks-sama.』

In their hands, everyone held the weapons of the bandits. Old men, women children… in their eyes filled with hatred, they pleaded to Fredricks.

『Please let us kill them.』

Hearing those words, Fredricks called out to the axe-wielding soldiers doing their duty.

『You can stop around there. Leave the rest for these ones. And we’ll be hanging up all the bodies. Please think of what’s to come when

you kill them.』

The villagers nodded, and with weapons in hand, they approached the soldiers. I could hear their voices ring out. It was something where just listening made me want to clench my eyes shut.

I couldn't understand the reason the Fifth had shown me this scene. The Fifth folded his arms.

『… Truly, I shouldn't have done something like that. I do regret it. But the me of the time who'd sworn vengeance thought that was the absolute right.』

I to the Fifth.

"And it was wrong?"

『Who knows? There's no way to find out, is there. They did thank me for it. I saw villagers regretting it as well. I can't tell you what would have been right. But this along I can say. Lyle, don't be like me. You can have a heart of vengeance. But don't carry out revenge like me. For me, the regret is the strongest part that remains. It was only sunny for the slightest sliver of it all.』

There, the scenery changed. It was the Walt House's mansion.

Urged on by the surroundings, Fredricks headed for a certain room.

『Fredricks-sama, quickly!』
『It's a healthy baby boy!』
『Now hurry!』
『Don't drag your feet like that!』
『I-I know. I get it already.』

There were women with large stomachs. They were the Fifth's mistresses, and around them were retainers looking after them

『Don't run! I'm begging you, don't run like that! Fredricks-sama, please say something to everyone too! What would happen if they fell and were injured!? The wife and young master aren't going anywhere!』

When I thought I heard a voice almost exactly like Baldoir's, I saw

Fredricks being pushed on the back by his mistresses into a room.

In it was a baby who'd just been born. He was crying energetically, while the woman who was the legal wife embraced him with a smile.

『Dear, it's an energetic baby boy.』

Perhaps happy she was able to safely give birth, the woman was tearing up. Looking at the baby, Fredricks looked as if he was trying to conceal his happiness.

『I-I see. You did your best. G-good job…!』

He reached out his hand, and the moment he tried to touch the boy. Fredricks pulled his hand back, and looked at his palm. The Fifth conveyed his sentiment at the time.

『… I didn't want to touch him with my bloodstained hands. I thought he would be tainted too. At that moment, I felt intense regret. Naturally enough, the ones I killed had families of their own. From the point of view of their families, I was their target of revenge. I wonder why it was… when I thought that, it felt as if I was going to break. It was something so obvious. I had enough reason to do it all, yet I wonder why.』

Fredricks was crying.

『Dear?』

『… Good job. So get some good rest for now. I'll send a notice to your house. I'll go and give my thanks. I… have to go.』

Wiping his tears, Fredricks left the room.

❼

Within the Jewel. The Fifth's room of memories.

What I saw there was the reason the Fifth couldn't be honest to his children. The room of memories took on the shape that left the strongest memories to him… it displayed the stable for his animals.

The Fifth turned to me.

『Now then, that's about all I can teach you. It's a bit late, but I get the feeling I could've gotten away without showing you, but I'm sure you'll be fine.』

"Fifth."

At that moment, from the quilin's room in the deepest part of the stable, a fully-grown quilin emerged. Approaching the Fifth with swift steps, she nuzzled him.

"Fredricks!"

『May, huh. I caused you quite some trouble.』

"Of course not. I had lots of fun. Because I got to see Fredricks again."

Milleia-san looked at the Fifth with a bit of a conflicted expression. The Fifth looked at me and smiled.

『My final Skill is【Map Model】. To put it simply, you can move the map form being centered on you to show any point you want. There's a limit to its scope, but it's quite convenient. You can seek out people who're hiding. And you can scope out good spots to hide too.』

While fighting bandits and mercenaries, being attacked by his surroundings, I'm sure this is the Skill the Fifth desired.

But he let out a light sigh.

『Well, what I really wanted to give you this time was this. Look.』

Saying that, what he handed to me was a silver galient blade. However, unlike the others, it felt as if the sword was a real live animal… and I got the feeling it was hungry.

『Perhaps because of me. This one's considerably dangerous. Unlike the First's Giant Sword. Fiennes' Halberd is quite obedient. The Second's Bow reliably does its job. My dad's daggers… well, they're fitting of my dad. But this one's simply specialized to kill. It isn't the

First's type of strength. I'm sure it's most effective in group battles.』

The eyes he looked at the sword with were a little conflicted. There were no mechanical gimmicks to the silver galient blade. There were lines running across the metal, and when I gripped it, it let off a faint blue light. Blue lines ran across it like veins, informing me of its hunger.

For some reason, that ominously shaped weapon looked like the sword of some demon from a fairy tale.

『… Lyle, you have to master it. It'll surely prove useful in times to come. But don't become obsessed with killing.』

May spoke to the Fifth.

"It's fine. Lyle has me and everyone else with him."

Milleia-san also smiled.

『Right. The current Lyle isn't alone. Father didn't let anyone get close to him.』

The Fifth scratched his head, and hung his head.

『… Even when I knew I was wrong, I couldn't turn back. And while I couldn't find out what I should've been doing, I had build up this stable. I'm sure I was tired. I'm sure I caused a lot of trouble. Milleia, to you as well.』

Milleia-san gripped the hem of her skirt, and lifted it lightly to give a neat curtsey.

『Just hearing an apology from father makes me glad I became a guide. And Lyle.』

When I turned to Milleia-san, she smiled and held out my hand. When I held out mine, she opened hers to show a blue Jewel.

Septem-san.
LYLE.
And Milleia-san…

"This is the third…"

When I lifted my face, Milleia-san smiled as she embraced me. Wrapping her hands around my back, she whispered into my ear.

『Our plans have been largely thrown off. We were thrown around by LYLE-kun quite a bit. But perhaps that was for the best. As this Jewel's guide, I recognize you, Lyle. So accept your last Skill.』

As the Jewel absorbed into my body, the words floated in my head. But it was hazy, and I couldn't quite understand it. All I could tell was that my third stage Skill was quite unique. Just once… if I used it, it was the Skill that held the compensation of the Jewel losing its power.

"Milleia-san, could it be…"

Milleia-san kissed my forehead. As her face grew close, I could tell from looking up close that she was holding back tears.

『Lyle, I leave Miranda and Shannon to you. Miranda has weaker parts to her than you think. And in contrast, Shannon has strong parts to her. So the two of them don't take the wrong path… so they don't turn out like me, you have to firmly hold their hands. At times, pamper them a bit.』

The Fifth scratched his face with a finger. He was looking at May.

『Sorry. This is it for me. I have a lot of things I want to say, but… I've only one request.』

May looked at the Fifth.

"What is it?"

『I leave Lyle to you. He's a descendent too good for me. At the start, he was unreliable, but now he's stronger than me. He's my… our pride.』

I gripped the hilt of the galient blade. My tears came out.

"Say something like that sooner. It's because you say it at a time like this that I'm crying. I was going to see you off with a smile at the end…"

Milleia-san wiped my tears with a finger.

『Cry from time to time. It's fine to show your weakness. Not to your surroundings, to Miranda and Shannon… and Novem and the others. They'll be surprisingly delighted. And this is a gift from me.』

Saying that, Milleia-san touched the silver galient blade. It felt as if she had put something into it, but I kept looking at her smile. I thought she had resembled Miranda, but as expected, she did have a trace of Shannon. No, the two of them had traces of her.

I smiled at her words.

"I'll remember it. It's a valuable female opinion."

『Good. If you can by cynical, I'm sure you'll be fine. The Jewel is full of power. You have to learn to master it. I'm sure you have enough power in you.』

Milleia-san's words were as if the Jewel itself was cautioning me. I nodded and took her words to heart

May looked at the Fifth.

"… Fredricks, I promise. I'll watch over Lyle. For your share as well. And I don't hate Lyle."

The Fifth smiled. And he started walking off, not towards the stable's insides, but towards the entrance. Milleia-san walked beside him.

『Father, I'll accompany you. And a final request from your daughter.』

『W-what?』

As he acted a little fearful, Milleia-san held out her hand.

『Would you hold my hand?』

The Fifth tilted his head as he held out his hand. Milleia-san grabbed it, and led him off. As they walked towards the stable's entrance, Milleia-san's figure grew younger, and in a bit of youthful voice…

『doing this had always been my dream.』

The Fifth was awkward. And happy.

『I wish I could've granted it while we were alive. I'm sorry… to all of you.』

The Fifth's gaze turned from a young Milleia-san to face forwards. It made me curious, so I wanted to try looking out myself, as I walked forward.

As me and May headed towards the entrance, outside we found five women… with young children around. The animals were waiting for the Fifth as well. They were all smiling.

"Fifth!"

"Fredricks!"

The Fifth answered with a wave without turning around.

『Idiot. There's no way I can turn around now. Like it'll be any fun watching someone like me cry. Do your best… the both of you.』

7

The round table room.

My hand extended, I looked at the round table… the place the Fifth once sat, and the galient blade floating above it.

May wasn't there. I'm sure her mind was returned from the Jewel to her own body. And the blade that floated there looked a little different from when the Fifth had handed it over. A little of its sinister feel remained, but its shape really did look just a little different.

The one waiting for my return was the Seventh.

Sitting in his chair, looking at the ceiling.

『Once upon a time. The woman I first fell for was my aunt… Milleia-san. Maybe that's why. Why I took up a gun in the first place.』

"Seventh, I…"

The Seventh stood, and headed off towards his room.

『Lyle, you were recognized by the Fifth, and by my aunt. Was I… recognized in the end or not… I wonder.』

Once he had left, I was the only one remaining in the round table room.

"… fifth, Milleia-san, thank you."

Saying that, I wiped my tears on my sleeve. Every time the weapons within the room increased, the number of ancestors went down. Every time I got stronger, I grew lonelier.

At the start, the Fifth gave off a cold impression, but I found out later what sort of person he was. He was awkward. Completely different from the image of him passed down. And he worked hard.

And Milleia-san was… this and that, but to I who lacked memories of my own mother, she was a mother-like person. Noisy, playing around with the Seventh, at times even surprising the ancestors.

Once they were gone, the loneliness started to well up.

"Really… why is it. When I thought they were so noisy, why won't my tears stop…"

It was terrible at the start. There were times they would insult me. There were times they would make fun of me. And yet, when everyone was gone, I grew lonely. I let my eyes take in the floating silver weapons before me, letting them rest on the galient blade. When I reached out my arm, my hand touched the hilt.

When I gripped it, I found it was less hungry than before. Perhaps that was because of Milleia-san.

"Please lend me your strength. Right now, I need your power."

Feeling a pulse from the sword, I returned my mind to the world of reality.

The Demon's Medicine

When I opened my eyes, I saw light streaming in from the gaps in the tent.

What I could hear from outside were the voices of our allies still fighting against the dead men of Bahnseim. All through the night…. When you think of how they'd fought through it, you could only question their sanity.

No, I doubt they were sane from the start. If this is what it meant to be charmed by Celes, then I really have no words other than madness.

Raising my upper half, I covered my face with both hands.

"… Monica."
"What could it be!"

Entering my tent, Monica was carrying a bucket of hot water, with all the preparations to outfit me in order. Her face was red, and I'd like to think it was just my imagination she looked excited.

"I'll get ready. Tell everyone to gather up… I'm going out on the front lines."

Monica immediately went into preparations. Leaving the bucket on a nearby wooden crate, she got out the armor she had polished yesterday some time when I hadn't been looking.

When I rose from the bed, I asked her for a report on the situation.

"How are we faring?"

Monica prepared as she reported to me. There wasn't any time, so she continued her explanations without stopping her hands.

“At present, a change has yet to come to our position as superiors. But if things continue like this for a few days, it is thinkable that the situation will reverse. Casualties have exceeded our predicted numbers. At this rate, a snag will come out in the plan.”

So it wasn’t a situation where we could win without much input. Then I’ve no choice but to move, and I had received the power to do it from the Fifth.

Could it be that rather than accepting his power, I’d have liked to accept his advice surely means that I’m weakening emotionally?

Shaking my head, I let out a sigh.

“Is something the matter? Are you unsatisfied with this Monica? What a luxurious chicken you are. Just say it. I’ll correct it at once, so out with it!”

Seeing her so desperate, I smiled a bit.

“It’s nothing. Just be as you are. You’re the best.”

There, Monica silently stared at me.

“… Please… please say it one more time! Like, it was a surprise attack, so I wasn’t able to turn on the audio and visual recordings in time, so if possible, once more with that smile. No, I do have it stored, but I’d like to preserve it in the highest resolution possible!”

She was saying more incomprehensible things, so I brought my hand to my chin in thought. In the end, I decided not to answer to her request.

“Sorry. I get the feeling it’ll be more interesting if I don’t say it, so I won’t.”

Monica bit down on her white apron regretfully.

“So that’s how you plan to toy with me! How unfortunate! Vexed as I am, don’t make light of this Monica who can even enjoy this treatment from you! Now toy with my affections more!”

As always, her high specs didn’t alter her unfortunate parts. The

same Monica as ever.

❼

I outfitted myself in the early morning, and stepped onto the battlefield. Today, May said she wanted me to ride her quilin form, so I equipped a harness, and mounted her.

Around, Maksim-san, Aria, Miranda, Gracia, Elza, Marina-san… as logistic support, Novem, Eva, Clara and Baldoir were stationed in the back. After the attack, Novem's group was to counteract magic, and to provide ranged support.

Before the hurriedly constructed gate, we waited for the moment we were fully prepared to attack. Maksim-san rode his horse to my side.

"Lyle-dono, today I've come with a personal request."

"Couldn't you have said it at the meeting?"

Maksim-san's face was serious. And he spoke plainly.

"In the past, I had a rival with whom I competed in skill. I fought him countless times, and I've more losses to count than wins. He wore black armor over his body, and his skill with a spear on horseback was splendid. That unity of rider and horse type deal. There's a man who's killed my friend, and has taken his armor for his own."

I looked forward.

"I've heard. Breid Vamper… an acquaintance of mine. A bit, no… he had a considerably strong lust for status."

Maksim-san fiddled with the positioning of his forehead protector.

"Could you concede him to me? Of course, I don't mind if that's after you determining it's possible for me. If I cannot accomplish it, I can only give up."

The knights right in front of the gate fired their magic at once to blow enemy soldiers away. The impact rang out all the way here, and I

could see a dust cloud rising on the other side.

The sound of guns and arrows wouldn't end as the flags waved violently.

"Based on the situation."

"That's plenty!"

As the gate opened, we held up our weapons for our assault. Gripping the Jewel, I imagined the galient blade in my mind. The silver ornaments surrounding it melted down, swelling until they took the shape of a sword in my right hand. It was an ominous blade, but it had lost a bit of its sinisterness. There were slender lines running across the metal, many thorns down it that made me feel I'd prick my finger on them.

"Lyle-dono, that sword it…?"

"… A weapon suited to this situation. Well then, let's be off. Attack!!"

As I held up the silver sword, May raced off. We crossed the gate faster than anybody, to find soldiers who wouldn't stop their assault despite the wounds on their body leaping out of the dust. They stuck out their spears, and leapt towards me.

"You're in the way."

As I swing the galient blade so it wouldn't hit May's neck, with the edge connected by thin blue veins, the sword separated and cut at the surrounding enemies.

Its form slicing as if it had a will of its own looked as if the sword was alive. As I clenched the hilt, I could almost hear a voice.

『Next. The next one! Let me cut more! Let me kill more!』

Next I tried thrusting it straight; the sword's point proceeded in a straight line towards the group of knights in front of us, impaling three. Going right into swinging it to the side, the blade turned, skewered knights and all, to lop off the heads of their soldiers.

This blade that could cut down many in a single swing truly was a

weapon suited to this situation.

“May… could you position us so we won’t drag any allies in?”

“Leave it to me!”

May raced off, discharging electricity around. That electric charge clad the sword, and when I swung it, those sent flying by May’s charge were cut down, and many were rendered immobile by a mere graze.

And when May took to the sky, I leapt down, and tried extending it to its maximum range.

Every time it grew, the metal sword portions increased in number, as it swung its rage screaming it wouldn’t let a single one get away. It sliced regardless of armor, flesh and bone.

The blood dancing through the air was an impossible sight, even on the battlefield. In that one swing, just how many people had died? Just how many had I killed?

Those thoughts floated through my mind, yet still my body swung the galient blade. It felt as if something was possessing me.

One who luckily escaped with only an arm lost, laughed as he used his spear in place of a cane to stand. Behind him, the next wave of soldiers were ready with their pikes.

“They just keep on coming.

Lightning rained down from the sky. The lightning that fell around was discharged by May, it seems. Even so, the soldiers set aim on her with their bows, while the ones with spear and sword headed for me. Trampling over their allies’ corpses, without even feeling a hint of fear.

“… Sorry, but I’ve no mind to apologize. Hate me all you want.”

When I swung the sword, a large number of people were cut up once more. I swung it for it to spin around me, and once I pulled in the expanded sword by its blue threads to return it to its original form, those unmoving soldiers fell to the dirt again.

At that moment, mounted knights trampled over the soldiers.

“You’re in the way. Move!”

Full plate armor. And the large war hammer in his hand might have been his prided weapon. Taking a large stance with it, he tried swinging it down on me.

From the Jewel, I heard the Seventh’s voice.

『He’s using such a large weapon, controlling his horse with his lower body alone. As a knight, he’s trained considerably.』

I’m sure he was he was a skilled knight. But…

“You’re the one in the way.”

The sword took distance from me as it swung it downwards, its snake-like expanse bisecting the foe horse and all. There, the knights flooding in from all around attacked at me with their spears.

As I held the sword to my side and waited for it to retract…

The heads of two knights fell. It had taken their necks on its way back.

“… It really is reliable on the battlefield. But like the first’s weapon, it sure does use up my Mana.”

It expended it. But it supplemented its use by supplying itself from the enemies it cut down. This ability…

“It’s Milleia-san. She’s as ill-natured as ever.”

… It was reliable, but for some reason, Milleia-san’s boasting face crossed my mind. There, taking along his knights, a black-armored man made his appearance.

“Lyle! How dare you waltz yourself before me!”

When I thought the soldiers had stopped flocking to me, it was Breid who made his entrance. I understood that he hated me, but this was a bit too prudent.

The Third in the Jewel was laughing.

『He's that kid from the Gryphon Subjugation, right? He's matured in a bad direction.』

The Seventh inquired.

『By your tone, I'd have to assume you knew he would only get worse, though?』

The Third sigh.

『No, the possibility wasn't zero, you see. He had the chance to rise up from there, and become someone decent. But now that he's stepped in front of Lyle, it's the end. We can only defeat him here.』

The Third's defeat meant to kill.

"… You're wearing some nice armor there. How does it feel to be so high and mighty?"

When I tried riling him a bit, it was quite effective. He raised his left hand, before lowering it towards me. The surrounding knights began their charge. I could feel those knights activating a Skill.

"Half-wit! With these numbers before you, charging in alone is what a fool would do! I'll crush you at once, and display your head to the enemy…"

Seeing him look so certain of his victory, I ended up giving a smile. Because doing that would piss him off more.

"I'm here because I believe I can win. And even now, that feeling hasn't wavered."

I swung the galient blade to suck up Mana from the surrounding corpses. Milleia-san said the Jewel was increasing in power, and it seems an influence was coming out in the ancestors' weapons.

The ominous point of the blade took on the shape of a serpent's head. That sinister silver snake's form was as if its body was growing from the hilt…

"Devour them."

With a word, it launched out to attack. That large silver blade imitated the moves of a snake, dragging in and killing the approaching knights and soldiers. The blood soaked into its silver body seeped in, decreasing the Mana it took up.

Once there were no longer allies around him, Breid was clearly confused. I had aimed for all but he, and the galient blade had followed my orders.

“W-what. What did you do!!? How cowardly! Like that, you stuck ups hide behind your powerful weapons! Using those of lower birth like me as your stepping stones! When I’ve come all the way… when I’ve come all the way here!!”

As his allied soldiers came in succession, Breid tried to retreat behind them. I thought for a moment he hadn’t been charmed by Celes, but it seems that wasn’t the case. The Seventh sighed.

『Good grief. Using his birth as an excuse, and this is the outcome. He won’t even be good feeding for Lyle.』

I returned the sword to its original form. Seeing that, Breid likely assumed I was tired, as he stopped his retreat.

“R-right! There’s no way you can keep on with attacks like that! It’s my win. After showing so much leisure, you’re going to lose!”

The soldiers advancing around. But I didn’t move the blade.

“That’s wrong. I don’t need to anymore. Did you think me rampaging in the center was because I thought I could take everyone on alone? If chaos broke out here, it would bring an influence to the clashing front lines. And the one who’ll take you on isn’t me.”

Lighting fell around me. May had been plainly continuing her attacks form the sky, and on top of that, fire and ice came from behind me to swallow up knights and soldiers.

And riding a horse, a single knight passed me by. The surrounding sand following behind him as he advanced, the knight trampled down soldiers, as he clad his own horse in an armor of sand.

I could tell the allies coming from behind with the Fifth's and Sixth's Skill. An assault with lessened momentum held no meaning against our current state.

Maksim-san who attacked Breid leapt up and lowered his spear to knock Breid off his horse.

"… Stand. Your opponent is me."

Breid fell to the ground. As he used his sword to stand, his black hair was in a mess. His helmet had fallen off, and looked at Maksim-san, he wrung out his voice to those around.

"W-what are you doing! Kill him!"

He sought help from the surroundings, but even receiving enemy attacks, Maksim-san didn't falter. Because the swords and spears wouldn't pass through his armor of sand.

Sand arms protruded from his back, cutting down the surrounding soldiers with their weapons of sand.

"I know I may look like a fighter. But I'm good at magic too."

While I got the feeling there was something clearly wrong with his use of magic, if the man himself was fine with that, then let's just call him good at magic.

❼

… Breid looked at the knight before his eyes.

"Now take your stance."

Maksim was a famed knight of Bahnseim. Upon receiving a single attack form him, Breid understood he couldn't' win. He had enough ability to understand that.

As he looked around, he found his allies taking on other enemies, with few left to save him. And those few were cut down before Maksim as well.

“N-not yet. Taking on this many soldiers resolved to die, no matter how hard you lot struggle…”

Right after came a movement at the front. A large golem emerged. It bore the head of a lion, wearing armor with numerous hands extending form its back. Each hand held its own weapon, and it began mowing down its surroundings.

“T-that’s…”

Seeing Breid open his mouth wide, Maksim stuck out his spear. Breid rolled to avoid it, while knights and soldiers flocked around Breid to be cut down.

Maksim looked at Breid’s face.

“Originally, we wanted to avoid a fight like this. I’ve some complaints with showing our trump cards so soon, but more importantly, we’re at war. Our policy was not to take down an army with a small force.”

Breid sat himself up on the ground, as he pushed himself backwards.

“D-don’t screw… you mean to say you were going easy on us!?”

“No, that’s wrong. I’m only saying you weren’t the foe we were saving up our power for. Be proud. You’ve brought out Lyle’s party’s seriousness.”

Hearing those words, Breid slammed the ground. Again, and again.

“Like that, you lot… like that, you look down on everyone below you! Pedigree and talent… are the ones who have it really so special!? Then the one who can win against you can only be someone with nothing like me!”

Breid took out the medicine he’d received from Celes, and touched the bottle to his mouth. Drinking it all down, he looked at Maksim with a smile. Maksim didn’t provide an opening for him to exploit.

“T-that leisure of yours will be your downfall. This【Demon’s Medicine】is the completed product of the researchers that flowed in from Zayin! For the sin of angering me, you sh… shal…!”

As Breid's skin was dyed a shade of purple, his blood vessels grew visible on its surface as he spat up blood. His red blood turned violet, before changing all the way to green, his body gradually growing as the clothing and armor he wore snapped off.

Maksim looked at him as he offered a line.

"So that's your trump card? But what a pitiful form."

Seeing the sliver of expression visible through Maksim's armor of sand, Breid couldn't tell what shape his own body was taking. Looking at his two hands, they were horribly swelled. They had become purple, their thick blood vessels pulsating.

He looked down on its body, seeing it continue to grow. But that form was…

"What is this… what's happening to me, Celes-samaaaa!!"

A purple hornworm's head, as if something had been glued onto a human's upper body. There stood the body of a monster no one could think of as a success…

Sand Giant

… Fighting the elite forces of Bahnseim, Maksim clad his body in【Sand Armor】as he took in the sight before him.

“zZeEellezzZZz-zzaAmaaaA!!”

Before that giant purple something, Maksim reaffirmed his grip on his spear. That growing purple hornworm drew in and crushed all around it regardless of friend or foe as it grew, its head portion just barely retaining traces of humanity, yet that fact only served to amplify its eeriness.

Maksim had his allies stand back.

“I’ll take this one on! Everyone stand down!”

Even in this situation, enemy soldiers came at him. Bloodshot eyes. And while they knew there was no further salvation for themselves, the soldiers gleefully fought.

Maksim swung his spear to knock away the surrounding enemy soldiers, holding up his left hand.

“… Without relying on some drug, humans can become strong.”

Polishing their technique, taking up arms, making Skills emerge, learning magic… Maksim thought there were any number of ways for one to get stronger. It was fact.

But power one couldn’t control was meaningless, and a far shot from anything you could call true strength, or so was his opinion on the matter.

“I’ll have to show you. Why my name has became known throughout Bahnseim.”

“AGaGyaAAAaaAAA!!”

While Breid could no longer even speak human tongue, Maksim took in the rising dust cloud… sucking up sand and dirt from the ground as his form grew larger.

The Skill Maksim manifested was【Sand Arm】… a Rearguard magic he had devoted his study to and improved. Its Second Stage【Sand Armor】let him coat himself in an armor of sand, and by the Third Stage,【Sand Giant】… he could produce a colossus from it.

A form of an armored warrior… a single step of that sand giant was enough to crush and knock enemy soldiers aside.

“In a sense, you can expect this once you reach the Third Stage of most Skills. No real need to rely on a medicine for it.”

The sand giant held up its large spear. The purple apparition spat up emerald liquid from its mouth to attack. When the liquid hit the ground, it let off smoke alongside an irritating odor.

It would surely be dangerous if it had splashed him, but Maksim was currently within his sand. He was in the colossus’s mouth so he could see, but he could easily guard its entrance.

“Have some back!”

With a side sweep of the spear, the purple monster rolled, dragging Bahnseim soldiers in. When its body was wounded, the green liquid spouted out and melted down soldiers.

“Hmm, so if you attack it directly, it spits liquid. What a troublesome monster.”

Maksim had the giant hold its spear up high.

“Normally, perhaps all I’d have to do would be to blow it to bits with magic, but… I’m going to be using that property of yours. If you’re to hate anyone, hate Celes for making you such a fiend.”

Sand swirled around the hoisted spear, making it look as if it were a spinning drill. Once that was plunged into the monster, Maksim deployed a sand shield in front to protect himself and his allies.

The thrust spear spun, continuously dispersing that liquid around.

“GyaBGaaaaAH!”

The purple monster stopped moving after it had sprayed its green fluids on the Bahnseim soldiers around it. Besides Maksim, there were fire, ice, and beast-shaped colossi spreading death and destruction across the battlefield…

❼

Seeing that battlefield ruled by giants, I hung the leaned blade against my shoulder.

I had May pick me up, and I was watching the scenery from the sky. I looked around.

“Monica… there’s a unit concealing itself. Send forces there.”

『Found them. They aren’t the type who won’t stop attacking by any means. But now that we’ve come so far, we should’ve just shown our trump cards from the beginning.』

Monica’s opinion was spot on. But after we’d done so much, it’s not as if this reaction was unexpected.

An extreme Mana expenditure, on top of that our valuable Skillholders… what’s more, the ones who had attained their Third Stage Skills would immediately have to retreat to the back lines.

To we who lacked people fit to take commander roles, it was an exceedingly large problem.

“It’s because we couldn’t do that, that we… well, with this, the four-nation alliance and Cartaffs should notice that Bahnseim is dangerous.”

Monica immediately swapped to carrying out orders, as I let a sigh into the air. I looked at the sights below May.

“It sure is convenient. Even so, you inherited quite a few things from Fredricks, didn’t you Lyle?”

“Quite a few? You mean the Skill and this?”

When I lightly lifted the sword, May shook her head.

“Wrong. That’s one thing, but there are plenty more. Even now, you’re using Skills to look over and give orders to all your forces. Strong people, you know. A lot of them can’t help but put themselves at the front of it all.”

Hearing May’s words, I understood what she was trying to say. May meant that I was carrying on the Fifth’s teachings.

“I see… have I gotten a bit closer to them?”

❼

… Beim.

Warding off intense assaults from the city day after day, once their foes had begun showing signs of fatigue, Bahnseim’s generals held a meeting in their marquee.

“Now then, let’s hear the results.”

One of the generals stood.

“They conducted a night attack with the plundered ship, but as expected there were adventurers stationed on the port as well. Naval is one thing, but it did seem they had adventurers capable of activity in the middle of the sea, so the plan was a failure. However, with this, they won’t be able to continue directing all their forces to the wall alone. From what I’ve heard, they’ve diverted considerable war potential to their harbor.”

The Supreme Commander touched his chin.

“… I can’t understand it. Bahnseim’s naval force is infinitesimally close to nothing. With that failure, the difference in abilities should have become clear enough. Why did Beim distribute so many forces to the harbor?”

One of the lords participating answered his query.

“That’s how Beim is. The merchants hold strong power, and the authority lies with them. Couldn’t they have imagined their own ships being attacked? I visited Beim a few years back, but back then, it was nothing but surprises. I mean, they’ve no king. Of all things, a gathering of merchants is determining their course.”

Everyone present had some knowledge pertaining to Beim, but they were reminded they didn’t have a precise understanding of it. Then, the Supreme Commander muttered,

“I see, so that’s why they keep playing nothing but poor hands so late in the game. Without any experience with wars on this scale, and with a military force dependent on adventurers. We’re being made light of.”

The feudal lords looked at him.

“Supreme Commander, is it not about time we got serious?”
“We have a grasp of their power. I want to flood in with all due haste.”
“Before the time we’ll be busy, I’d like to bring an end to this war.”

For the feudal nobles’ troops and Bahnseim’s main force, a majority of the soldiers were workers. Using the territory’s population as soldiers meant that was precisely how many hands they were taking away from the territory… especially when it came to the breadwinner men.

From their point of view, with future territory management in mind, they wanted to put a swift end to this war.

The Supreme Commander was an imperial noble of Centralle. His standing was different, and it wasn’t as if he had a territory to hold and manage.

“Hmm, it’s true any further would be difficult. Once the cold sets in, our battles will give out greater casualties. We’ll also need to procure firewood in large quantities… I’m sure it would be best we made haste.”

The feudal nobles seemed just a tad irritated with his attitude. Because maintaining their troops didn't fall under the Supreme Commander's duties.

From the lords' point of view, it looked as if their commander didn't understand a thing. Of course, from the commander's point of view, it would be better if the lords' forces whittled down some more. He was an imperial noble of Centralle, after all.

He didn't think too highly of feudal nobles holding power.

(If we invade, they'll charge in headfirst to plunder, and whittle themselves down of their own accord, I guess. In that case…)

"Very well. Then I'll prepare some large-scale magic on my side. In regards to the attack…"

Kicking off his words, the feudal nobles raised their names.

"If that's the case, then leave it to me!"
"Your troops are unreliable! I'm more worthy!"
"Don't be so hasty. I've heard the prosperity of Beim is massive."

The generals looked at the feudal lords whose minds immediately turned to plunder with cold eyes. The Supreme Commander addressed them.

"For Beim's representative merchants, you'll have to leave them to us. There are negotiations to be had. Do what you want with whoever else. Oh, if possible, don't destroy buildings we could use for lodging. I don't quite like the tent lifestyle we've had all the way here."

Within the tent. Bahnseim's side was showing smiles of leisure.

But that was something backed by their prospects of victory. There were many adventurers in Beim, but they were specialized to battle in the Labyrinth. The power to overturn a level of numerical difference was laden onto those adventurers.

But for that, they had grown specialized in fighting within confined spaces.

The knights on the battlefield were different. When it came to the skilled ones…

❼

… Before night was to open.

Tanya wore the Guild uniform as she hurriedly moved around the east branch.

They had to look after the adventurers rotating onto break, but on top of that, arrangements for food and stationing people. By order from headquarters, they had to prepare food for the refugees gathering in front of the Guild.

The Guild's employees were working in haste.

There were few adventurers who'd been injured, but day by day, you could see the lights fading from their faces. The adventurers who'd laughed at Bahnseim's cowardice at the start, before these days of endless battle, their hearts were at the breaking point

"Rotation time's coming. Are we good on food?"

When one receptionist struck up a conversation, another came carrying in a large load.

"W-we are, but, well… the smell is leaking outside the Guild, and the refugees are demanding for us to fork it over to them as well… we can't prepare so much food in our provisional kitchen, so we've told them to wait."

Refugees had flooded into Beim. They had begun quarreling with the city's original residents, and the city's mood had taken a terrible turn.

There, a staff rushed over to Tanya.

"Tanya! The executive's calling for you. Wants you to come urgently, it seems."

After telling the personnel whose conversations she'd listened in on to prioritize the adventurers, Tanya headed for her superior's room…

❼

… At the executive's room, the executive with bags under his eyes reported the present situation to Tanya.

"It's been decided that we are refusing South Beim's demands."

"You're telling me this now? It's already been a few days since they returned from negotiations. What were you talking about in the meetings?"

Tanya's words were mingled with anger, but the executive didn't find fault in her.

"… At present, by Bahnseim's failed attack on the port, most in attendance have come to believe this will become a drawn-out war. In that case, Bahnseim will have to pull out within the next month."

Maintaining a large army required considerable supplies. At the same time, Bahnseim's troops consisted of their populace, and once they returned, they had their own work to do. That the feudal lords would pull out was what Beim's merchants had decided. And if this situation continued on, Beim would be able to hold out.

"Among the adventurers, they are developing a sense of crisis at Bahnseim, who shows not the slightest sign of crumbling. Morale is falling day by day, and at this rate, Beim will be the first to…"

Tanya complained, but she couldn't get her words out to the end. Because in the middle of the conversation, the room shook. It was a small tremor, but to that which was different from an earthquake, Tanya felt a sense of dread.

"… Something's strange. I'm going to take a look."

"What's wrong? It's true that tremor was surprising, but…"

Tanya said she'd look outside, jumping out the window, and transferring herself to the tallest building around.

Looking from there towards the wall, she saw a black smoke rising.

As the area gradually grew brighter, she tried to make out just what had happened…

❼

… Bahnseim's army slammed a number of large-scale magics into Beim's wall.

Overcoming the half-hearted adventurers' shields with pure numbers, they fired shot after shot. With their first offensive move after all this times, Beim's adventurers didn't make it to redeploy.

Countless magic bursts collided with the wall, but all it did was scrape at its surface.

Seeing that, the Supreme Commander spoke to himself.

"It's quite sturdy. Well, that's fine as it is."

Right after, he issued orders around. Hearing his orders, the surrounding forces aimed their magic not at the wall, but at the adventurers on guard duty atop it.

Lightning, fire, ice, water, stone… numerous magics rained down on top of the wall. The adventurers incapable of casting Magic Shield were blown off of it.

A few adventurers remained, but that wasn't a problem.

"Now then, you can use flashy magic like this too."

Bahnseim's magicians, meaning their nobles, prepared stairs of magic up the wall that could no longer resist. For such a large legion to climb such a tall wall, extremely wide stairs were prepared. The earth swelled up, and once those giant stairs were prepared, the army units who had been waiting for this moment started their race up it.

On top of the wall, adventurers fought the knights and soldiers of Bahnseim, but they were surrounded with numbers, and defeated.

The Supreme Commander watched it.

“… Hmm, how disappointing.”

He murmured, watching the large gates of Beim open up.

… The Capital of Dreams

… Beim was a city without a king, let alone any nobles.

It was the city of merchants and adventurers, and a city that had continued to grow. For that sake, there were remnants where old walls once stood.

Abandoning the outer regions, the city's residents retreated. At the port were the figures of merchants stuffing their own assets on their ships in an attempt to flee.

And at the port, various people who'd witnessed the barbarics of Bahnseim cried out for the ships to let them on board.

"Please let us on board!"
"It's my ship! We're already departing!"
"You're inhuman!"

At the chaotic harbor, ships lifted anchor one after the next. Among them were ships that, unable to take the sheer weight of their loads slanted and sunk to the depths. Some crashing into and dragging other ships of the crowded harbor as well.

The chaos of Beim was truly a depiction of chaos…

❼

… Having left to the outside of the Guild's East Branch, Tahnia equipped her own equipment, and fought the Bahnseim soldiers penetrating into the city.

Holding a spear and shield, she took their archer's support fire as she rushed at the soldiers waiting for her. Their expressions were

fearful.

“T-this woman…!!”

Not on the main street, they were a unit that moved aside to plunder. They weren’t too numerous, and from Tahnia’s point of view, nothing to write home about in strength.

“Too soft.”

Running horizontally across the buildings, and dodging enemy fire, she landed in their formation. Now that their formation had enclosed themselves in, Tahnia put a hand to the ground.

“W-what’s this!?”

“M-my legs are floating!”

The soldiers began rising, their legs bicycling in midair. Even to swing their weapons, they didn’t have anywhere stable to plant themselves, spinning circles in place.

To them, Tahnia pulled out the dagger at her hip, and cut a line across their necks. A force of a few tense ended with carotid rupture of their knights and soldiers. Once no one was left moving, their remains fell to the ground.

Tahnia looked around with her mask on her face. The fearful residents of Beim watched her from the alleys.

“Flee from here at once. Pass through this road, and head for the heart of Beim.”

On those words, she dashed off again, racing across the buildings’ walls, climbing up to the ceiling. Around she could see adventurers and soldier fighting. But their resistance wasn’t unified. They hadn’t anticipated a fight within the city.

Tahnia looked around. When she spotted Bahnseim soldiers slipping by the adventures, she’d go and finish them off. She saw other sweepers out fighting, but they were of shallow experience; they were feeling the reverberations of most of the skilled ones being taken out by Lyle’s party.

“Whatever the case, we can’t overturn our loss.”

It wasn’t on a level where something could be done with individual ability, yet here was the land with so many excelling individually. They were too ignorant of war.

All had eventually flowed towards negotiations with surrender in their field of visions. But Tahnia’s eyes narrowed.

The Beim merchants who had gone out to negotiate had their heads displayed on the main road. Surely an indicator of Bahnseim’s stance towards negotiations.

“This is… something like this is! …!”

Tahnia moved, and an arrow stuck into where she had been standing. Those arrows that burrowed deep into the building’s roof were fired several at a time.

The ones moving as if they were flying across the tops of buildings were knights of Bahnseim.

“Found one of those Sweeper fellows.”
“You think this’ll earn us a bonus?”
“Cover me. It’ll be troublesome if the small feudal lords are eaten up. We’d best crush it quickly.”

That party of three that looked at Tahnia as if she were only prey were clearly different from the ones she had been taking on to that point. Tahnia started off towards those three Skillholders, drawing a knife from her pouch.

One of them knocked her knife aside with her sword, but the sword shattered. The knight immediately discarded his hilt and took distance. The knife pierced into a building’s roof and pierced through it.

“It’s terribly heavy. Is that her Skill? These guys really have all sorts of strange Skills.”

The knight pulling out his spare dagger. The knight poised with his bow. Tahnia resolved herself beneath her mask.

“I can’t let any Skillholders proceed passed this point.”

On Tahnia’s words, the three knights smiled. Tahnia had intended to leap the moment they showed an opening, but…

“The folks of Beim truly are interesting. It’s true we’re Skillholders, but… it’s not like we’re particularly special or anything.”

Tahnia watched the men as she took a step in.

Using a Skill to manipulate gravity… as the knights were surprised by the speed of her lightened body, Tahnia used her weightened knife to cut through one sword-and-all.

From her breastpocket, she produced a sack or iron, and held it aloft. Tossing it right above the knight with the bow, it suddenly grew heavier, as small lumps of iron rained down on him.

And the knight with the dagger approached to cut at her.

“You’re quite the strong one.”

“Kuh, and you’re quite carefree with your comrades taken out.”

As the foe slashed at her consecutively, Tahnia parried.

“Comrade? Are you crazy? Those guys were nothing but trouble to me. A coward who’d hold a bow despite being a knight, and that damn cheeky brat… to me, they were just in the way. I’m sure the feeling was mutual.”

Her foe’s power had increased, and no matter how heavy she made her knife, he repelled it. His dagger cut through her mask.

“What, you’ve got quite a cute face there.”

But Tahnia was able to plant a kick in his abdomen. The knight had some piece of mind with his armor, but Tahnia’s kick pierced a hole into it, embedding deeply into his flesh.

Seeing her opponent spit blood, Tahnia sat on the spot. As she confirmed there were no other enemies around.

“I can’t fight for much longer.”

She muttered regretfully, as she began moving to return to the Guild…

❼

South Beim.

As I was reorganizing troops and doing paperwork in the office, a report came in from Monica. Novem had come to the room as well, as a vital point had come.

“We’ve already begun to encounter merchants fleeing from Beim. The walls were breached, having become nothing but an ornament, as they’ve holed themselves up in the walls protecting the city’s center. Fights are breaking out on the streets, and both Bahnseim and Beim have put out considerable casualties.”

Putting both sides together, around four hundred thousand were clashing. Of course, thinking of pure fighting force, it was lower than that. Even so, that both sides had burst into muddled battle was something for me to sigh about.

“… They really plan to kill them all. And it doesn’t seem Beim has finalized its policy on whether it’s going to put up resistance or flee.”

And it didn’t feel as if they were buying time for others to flee. They were coming at them, so they fought. Even surrender wasn’t accepted. In such a situation, Beim’s soldiers were dead men walking.

Bahnseim wouldn’t get out unscathed either.

Monica looked at me with a serious expression on her face.

“It does not seem Beim’s brains will be able to fulfill their role. Originally, they’d have lowered their heads to us, but the walls were breached before news of our victory could reach. They are in chaos.”

Beim was frailer than we had anticipated. Based on how they went about it, they’d have even been capable of making Bahnseim retreat.

That's how much of a force they had, but I felt I got a lesson on how fragile everything became when the top was brittle.

The Third in the Jewel laughed a bit.

『… It's scorched earth. When they could've just had all Beim's people retreat somewhere in a few months, and taken off with all their food and wealth. It's true in next few years… no, five to ten, whatever the case, they'll need some time to get back to normal. Even so, they can get back on their feet. Bahnseim had a problem with supplies, and they're somehow fighting on with their plunder from Beim. It would've been an interesting fight the fleeing adventurers chose to hide out in the Labyrinth.』

Unable to accomplish their goal, through food problems, Bahnseim would face a declining war potential, and lose control of its assets. It's true that was a valid way to go about it. The Seventh nodded.

『Well, it's too late to speak of what ifs. If it were me, I'd either create a situation where the surroundings would cooperate, or prepare to defend alone. I can only sigh at Beim, who chose not to depend on anyone, yet acted as if they weren't thinking of defense at all.』

The Third to that opinion.

『To be honest, the ones who made it so they couldn't get any cooperation… were us though.』

He said and laughed.

Novem looked at me.

『Lyle-sama, what shall we do? Even if we abandon Beim like that, there is a possibility the armies of Bahnseim will make their way towards South Beim eventually.』

So it was only a problem of where we would fight. Even if South Beim was sieged, the difference in numbers would make a terrible situation. I can't say we'd be able to breach Bahnseim's actual army with a small force.

I looked at Monica.

“We were recruiting volunteer soldiers from the area, were we? How many have gathered?”

Without changing her expression, Monica relayed the number.

“They must have felt a great fear, as there have been few to take up the offer. It doesn’t even reach a thousand.”

It wouldn’t even fill the hole left by fighting Breid.

“After reorganizing our forces, we will make way for Beim. But there’s somewhere we shall stop by on the way. We’ll send an advance force straight there. It’s best if we can get them to fight under my command.”

I nodded.

And how large a mountain of corpses would I have to pile to reach up to Celes, I wondered.

Novem looked towards me.

“Then what will you do, Lyle-sama?”

I moved as planned. As planned… I would head for Redant Fortress.

“Our plans have gone amiss, but still, the preparations are in order. We’ll take along the nobles who’ve chosen to assist us, and their soldiers, and head for Redant Fortress.”

7

… As the battles raged on in Beim, a few ships arrived at its port.

There wasn’t any signs of anyone around, and seeing it so terribly littered, Vera couldn’t think it the same port of Beim she knew.

“So this is how bad it can get.”

Standing beside her, the one watching the soldiers rise to deck was

Novem. The soldiers… the Valkyries had small differences in appearance. But even so, there was no change in the blue armor they wore.

Seeing the Valkyries made of the monster who'd once pained her so, Vera made a conflicted face.

"I never thought that Trident Serpent would end up looking like this. I'm sure these girls are strong, but is it enough to turn Bahnseim back?"

Novem addressed a smile to her.

"That would be difficult. If we had the same numbers, it wouldn't be a problem, and we could even fight a few times that, but when they have several tens of thousands, it stops being a battle. But…"

Among the Valkyries, Novem had taken along the especially proficient Unit Three. But Unit Three was making quite the reluctant face.

"Please don't pull my leg. Why am I here… when I wanted to go to Redant alongside my master. More than that, I should've been the one to take him on my back, and carry him all the way. Hah, I don't feel like doing anything."

As Vera watched Unit Three cradling her legs as she sat, her head began to hurt.

"Are they really that strong?"

Novem gave a bitter smile.

"Yes. There's no doubt about that. And Bahnseim's soldiers moving through this sprawling city can't carry out coordinated actions. Rather than fighting ten thousand once, if we fight a hundred a hundred times, we won't lose."

Aria came out on deck. Her preparations were in order, and she was wearing armor.

"Uwah, there's smoke rising over there. So we just have to plainly go around saving Beim's soldiers, right?"

From behind her, Miranda emerged.

“I won’t call it easy. We’ve got to prove to them that we’re allies. Want to go to the East Branch first? We can explain our situation there, and make sure we don’t get attacked by Beim’s soldiers.”

That advance force taken on a few ships didn’t even reach a thousand.

But their goal was to provide assistance, and to buy time until Lyle could lead the main force there.

Miranda looked fed up as she stroked her hair, staring fixatedly at Beim.

“They could’ve held out just a little longer. Because of that, we couldn’t get any decent rest in.”

As Beim had crumbled faster than they had imagined, Lyle had to organize another force to send. Originally, they should’ve been set to fight a more-exhausted Bahnseim.

Vera looked over the members.

“Then the ship will be returning to South Beim as scheduled. And make sure you don’t lose until Lyle gets here.”

On Vera’s words, Novem smiled a bit.

“What?”

“No, I just thought Lyle-sama has met some good people. We’ll be fine over here, and Lyle-sama won’t have any problems on his side. I’m sure right around now…”

Right around now, Lyle was…

7

I wore the armor of the elite forces, playing the part of an injured soldier to infiltrate the Fortress.

Looking around, I could see the faces of the others similarly playing the injured soldier roles.

“That Baronet did good work. Or rather, it felt as if they already thought the elites would lose… did some remnants return beforehand.”

Standing straight, and taking the weapon he brought in hand, Baldoir kept wary of his surroundings.

“Lyle-sama, you’re too calm. This is enemy soil. What’s more, we don’t even have five hundred.”

We were putting on a play of return after defeat to gain entry to Redant Fortress. Baldoir was nervous.

Maksim-san who infiltrated in a similar fashion hit at Baldoir’s shoulder.

“Don’t be so tense. When it comes to this sort of thing, Lyle-dono’s a master. I’m really glad I didn’t make an enemy of him.”

He was smiling, but I really couldn’t rejoice at that evaluation. I pulled my sword as I looked at the entrance.

“Ah, my bad. Our plans were probably seen through.”

Gathering behind the doors were the armed soldiers of Bahnseim.

Maksim-san took his spear in hand, while Baldoir pulled his sword. As the soldiers we brought along reached for their weapons, a door opened.

“… I was waiting for you, Lyle Walt-kun. No, would you prefer –dono? Or perhaps –sama?”

The one who entered the room was the one onto whom the responsibility of Redant Fortress was pushed onto, General Blois.

“Oh my, for the person I wanted to meet to go out of his way to greet me.”

In the Jewel, the Third was impressed.

『His head turns nicely. No, were we negligent? If that's how it'll be, it's troublesome that we have no choice but to take some strong measures.』

With my current power, I'm sure it would be possible to cut my way out of this situation. But on top of being unarmed, the other party was shrugging his shoulders.

"Sorry. I know you all seem so revved up an all, but… I'd like to surrender. You already have forces waiting outside, don't you?"

I turned a glance to the soldiers behind the doors. General Blois fiddled with his hair, as he gave orders for them to stand down.

"My apologies. They follow me around no matter what I do, or I guess that excuse won't work. Well, if you're going to accept our surrender, a majority of this fortress' war potential will come under your command."

"Majority?"

"… No~, you see I'm not quite trusted here. So there were people left to keep watch on me. Did my best to restrain them."

He was speaking fluidly, but this man… The Third sounded interested.

『Whoohoo, he's selling himself out. No, he's got a good grasp on his own situation, I guess?』

I put away my sword and looked at the general.

"You'll betray Bahnseim, and come under my command?"

General Blois scratched his face with a finger.

"Isn't that your goal? I mean, you used the Baronet to move various pieces and all. I was really in awe, and I've got nowhere left to run. If it's no good whether I win or lose, then I can only pick the third option."

Even if General Blois had won against me, the man had no future. If he lost, of course, he didn't have a future either. If it reached a

stalemate, he'd surrender.

"… Understood. We'll accept the offer. But we'll be putting you to work right away."

On my words, General Blois nodded.

"Very well. Shall I send message that Redant Fortress has fallen?"

… With him stealing my line, I felt a slight sense of defeat.

Pincer Attack

… Bahnseim's main camp.

Still carrying out battle within the city of Beim, their heads were troubled with the war progress that wouldn't go anywhere come so far.

The order from Celes was a vague one along the lines of 'crush Beim', and the words slaughter them also came out. But to what extent would they actualize it? And how far did they have to go for Celes to be satisfied? Those were the questions.

It was a battlefield with uncertain conditions for victory. But to Bahnseim, rather than a battleground, Beim had been a hunting ground. But come this far, Beim was gaining its own flow.

The Supreme Commander tapped his index finger against his staff as he contained his irritation.

"Can't we drill magic into the city to silence them? The moment we could no longer use our numerical advantage, we've stagnated have we not?"

One of the generals folded his arms as he looked down.

"But if we destroy all of the city's functions, the Labyrinth managed by the city will become unmanageable. In the worst case, there is a risk of it running out of control. It's a Labyrinth that exceeds a hundred floors down, so we can't even predict the damage from that."

The reason they couldn't just annihilate Beim at once, was the existence of the Labyrinth. Offering any unskillful stimulus to it could worsen, or perhaps rampage it. By a Labyrinth much smaller in scale

than Beim's, a country once their neighbor had fallen.

That in their minds, once Bahnseim's side secured the Labyrinth, there was a necessity for them to manage it.

But the city's interior fell under the terrain advantage of Beim's residents, and a confined space was an easier combat field for the adventurers.

Even so, in number and quality, Bahnseim's army wasn't losing out, but…

"That royal guard kid hasn't come back either. Having casualties spread across the main force any further would be…"

As the Supreme Commander murmured, a messenger burst into the tent.

"Message! The forces within the city led by the Viscount have faced annihilation at the hands of adventurers! The form of a female knight in red armor was confirmed at the scene!"

"Again!"

A knight brigade chief stood, and hearing the report, a wrinkle descended ono his brow.

"When we solidified the knights and Baronets to move together, they target the Barons and Viscounts next."

Continuing on, a pale-faced messenger raced into the tent.

"Message! Our camp within the city has been taken. A female knight in green armor flooded in with a few thousand soldier, causing our unit to retreat!"

One of the generals cried out.

"Send reinforcements! Kuh, they're on a roll."

And once more, a messenger burst in. Covered in mud, and borrowing the shoulders of two soldiers, the messenger was terrible exhausted.

“What is it this time!?”

Out of breath as he was, the messenger relayed the message.

“… The elite force led by royal guard captain Breid has faced defeat. Their survivors number a few thousand. Lyle Walt of South Beim went right on to occupying Redant Fortress… South Beim’s troops number in the low thirty thousands, by estimate… their army waves the flag of Cartaffs… rescuing Beim’s people as… they head this direction.”

That report made the Supreme Commander stand in surprise. He spoke to the generals in the marquee.

“You mean to say he prepared such numbers!? … Pull out the units within the city at once. We need to reorganize our formation! At this rate, we’ll face a pincer!”

Just how many soldiers remained in Beim? And within the city, Bahnseim had received casualties they couldn’t ignore.

On that battle where Lyle had cut off their path of retreat, the expressions of leisure were blown off the faces of Bahnseim’s generals…

❼

I split my force and left some in Redant Fortress, to give a bit of insurance.

“I don’t think they’ll betray, but those sorts of people are too proficient they bring harm, is what I think.”

Riding Porter, I lay down and turned my eyes not to Valkyrie Unit One and Two glaring at Monica, but to Eva, who had a memo pad in hand.

“Hey, when you’re the one who requested I make a song of your ancestors, don’t think about anything else. So Fredricks-san met that quilin, right? Rather, despite being so cold to his children, what do you mean he was an animal lover? Hey, just how do you expect to

turn this to a song or story?”

Hearing her complaints, I lay across the sofa.

“Sorry. But I’ve got a lot to think about. And the Fifth had his reasons. He was a kind man. Kind, and awkward.”

Eva shrugged her shoulders, writing down some more notes. And looking over her memos, she spoke.

“Aren’t you overthinking it? We entered Zayin territory, so they can’t follow so easily. Well, there’s still the possibility they’ll invade.”

As Eva worried over Bahnseim’s movements, I turned her a smile.

“Don’t worry about that. It seems their forces have already reorganized, and they’re waiting for us over there. Fearing a pincer, they split their forces in two, but even so, they still have a greater number than us.”

Even if Novem’s unit in Beim was doing its best, we had a need to hurry of our own.

In the Jewel, the Third thought to himself.

『Even if we had a ship, just how many could we send in one trip. I think dispersing war potential and sending it successively is a bad move.』

The Seventh laughed.

『I’m sure they can’t shoot any flashy magic out of fear of the Labyrinth. We have Novem on that side, so I’m sure they’ll overturn an extent of absurdity. No~ as expected of a former goddess. No, evil god, was it? Well, it doesn’t really matter either way.』

They really were loose people.

Facing Monica in Porter’s loading tray area, Unit one reported to me.

“Oh, a report from my sister in Zayin. It seems Zayin has prepared a rest stop for us. Once we get that far, we’ll be able to give the soldiers some rest.”

Hearing that, I raised my torso.

“That’s a huge help. Give Aura and Thelma-san, and Gaston-san my thanks.”

By the time they were looking for us in Beim territory, we had entered the four-nation alliance, and set course for the port.

The reason being that I felt sorry for conducting a surprise attack every time, and I wanted to fight them head-on for once. That one was the Third’s suggestion. Having thought up scorched earth, he was considerably dirty. The Third Generation Head was extremely dirty.

❼

… Miranda took charge of thirty Valkyries alongside the soldiers they had brought in from South Beim, and the adventurers and soldiers who’d joined them in Beim.

Looking only to numbers, they didn’t have three thousand, but their equipment was in order, and they were fighting while circulating any needless personnel to the back. Looking at a map of the city, they kept watch for enemy movements as they surrounded any foe they found to beat them down.

Miranda lined up some crates, spreading the map on top of that, and sticking in an indicator.

“So I’m sure the evacuation is proceeding, right?”

When she asked a bearded veteran-esque adventurer, he nodded.

“We’re doing it. However, this is the first I’ve heard of evacuating to the Labyrinth. Is a nest of monsters really someplace you can take refuge in?”

Miranda looked at the adventurer.

“There’s no helping it, is there? We don’t have any ships to evacuate them on. The merchants fled to save their own skins, didn’t they?

Then we can only do what we're capable of."

A population too high… it had developed by magic, and magical treatment was also a factor of the increase in population. On top of that, Beim's supplies relied heavily on import. But they were even able to expend their massive imports, exporting other things for income. The reason they were able to do so was because of the massive Labyrinth they managed.

And their increased population was, at this point, just dragging their feet. There were insufficient locations to shelter them, so Miranda's unit chose to use the Labyrinth.

"And the Labyrinth is too unexpected they they'll hardly notice. If they do enter it, that in itself is the unchallenged realm of adventurers, right?"

On those words, the adventurer nodded. Placing a hand on his head, and smiling a bit.

"It's true, I don't get the slightest feeling we'll lose there. And right now, we're fighting within a mountain of rubble."

Magic and fire, but then, the flourishing cityscape of Beim had collapsed, with rubble rolling around the roads. There were many buildings that had caved in, and now they were merely ruins.

Around, the soldiers of Beim were looking at Miranda. And the adventurer who'd had the role of getting them together until her arrival offered a word.

"… If only folks like you guys had come sooner.

Did he hate Miranda, or perhaps the upper echelon that ran away? There was no mistaking that his feelings were complex.

Miranda let out a light sigh.

(I've got to skillfully guide them towards hating Beim's merchants and Guild higher-ups. But even so, they keep sending goods and soldiers in succession, but… now that the enemy's offensive force has weakened, it may be a good idea to step back and regroup.)

❼

On the encampment prepared by Zayin, we let the soldiers rest.

From there would be a forward march to Galleria's port, and the ship there would take us to Beim.

With those plans unfolding, in my tent lay Clara, who was worn out from operating Porter. Monica put out snacks and drinks for our guests.

In that tense tent interior. It was twilight outside, and perhaps the soldiers were drinking ale, as I could hear some rowdy voices.

The energized voices outside, and the sound of Monica preparing tea, I could hear it well. In that tent where I could even hear Clara's sleeping breath… Eva had escaped from the tent at full speed, successfully fleeing from this dangerous air. The Third in the Jewel was exhilarated.

『Hooray! It's getting interesting around here. A tea party with these members, if it were me, I'd have refused. Good going, Lyle.』

That didn't make me happy. That didn't make me happy at all.

"… Um, Lyle-dono? You've been quite busy these days, but how is your body faring?"

Thelma-san who came over to greet us. Naturally enough, she had soldiers of Zayin, she had come over to raise our morale. Perhaps Aura-san was too busy to move, so the previous generation's Holy Maiden Thelma-san had come.

But in Zayin, the songs of me and her were in fashion, and with their spread, it seems Thelma-san had become conscious of them.

At times her face went red. The ones looking at her were Gracia and Elza. Zayin's minstrel elves were performing their songs to the soldiers, and when they heard our song, they had rushed into the tent.

What's more, when Thelma-san was there.

“Lyle, what is the meaning of this? I heard you didn’t particularly have anyone in Zayin…”

Gracia looked at me with a frigid expression. Elza with cold, emotionless eyes… no, she was a little teary. It hurt the heart.

“No, that was just a song. I’m telling the truth. When I saved Zayin, there were strange rumors of Aura-san as well, but it does seem that one is on the decline, or rather…”

There, Elza stood.

“S-so there’s more!? Just how many women have you layed hands on!? I-I did hear the number was high, but this much is…”

From the Jewel, I heard the Seventh’s grim voice.

『Now how will you overcome this crisis, Lyle? I can’t think up any plans to overcome this one. How will you cut through this disadvantage! Prove your worth, son of Walt! 』

He was definitely enjoying this. The Third’s voice was serious.

『Why don’t you just push them down already? I’m sure it’ll become a pain, and it’ll trouble you for years to come, but… that’s just what I’d like to see. No! Turning to Clara-chan here is also valid, don’t you think!?』

These guys really were the worst. Within that tension different from the battlefield, I tried to think of what sort of excuse I’d give… when my body suddenly lost its power.

“H-huh?”

There, Thelma-san approached me.

“Are you alright, Lyle-dono!?”

Elza spoke.

“G-get away from him! Think of the age difference, former Holy Maiden. And for Lyle to use such transparent means to throw smoke

over the topic… wait, Lyle?”

Elza peered into my face. And Gracia looked at me…

“This is… it couldn’t be, with this timing? Why? No, I’ll admit it woulsn’t be strange for it to happen in that situation.”

There, Monica looked at me as she quivered.

“… Fever time. It’s time for fever time! Finally, the time has arrived for the true chicken dickwad to come out!”

Gracia looked at Monica, tilting her head.

“Fever time? No, I get what you want to say. But it’s downright dangerous to send him at the enemy in his post-Growth.”

Elza seemed to understand, as she nodded.

“R-right. We need to isolate Lyle. So let’s use Rusworth’s–”

Gracia grasped Elza’s collar and lifted her up.

“Bitch! What did you plan to go with those words!? Out with it! Look me in the eyes and say it!”

Elza averted her eyes. Thelma-san rested my fallen head on her lap, and tried letting me rest. This is troublesome. It feels so motherly, extremely comfortable.

Within that boisterous tent, Monica spoke to Gracia and Elza.

“Quiet down! There’s no need for such ruckus. For the Chicken Dickwad, never has it happened that he’s failed through post-Growth. More than that, you need only think this is where it gets serious!”

My body gradually grew heavier. And feeling that intense fatigue, I spoke to Monica.

“Wait. Wait a second. Don’t phrase it as if the post-Growth me is the true me! Please don’t.”

From the Jewel, the Third in a shaking voice.

『What timing. Lyle truly is a man who's got it.』

It seems the Seventh shared his opinion.

『Wonderful. Thinking of our boat ride from Galleria to Beim, I thought that time-wise, just maybe… this is that best timing thing.』

Wrong. It's definitely not. There's no way this post-Growth will last until we arrive in Beim… probably. That's what I'd like to think.

Festival

… Bahnseim's army robbed of Redant Fortress by Lyle's force of South Beim. Receiving the report, they sent almost half of their movable forces- a force of sixty thousand- in the opposite direction from Beim.

The main force did so, in order to prevent a pincer from Beim and South Beim. Proceeding to Redant Fortress, they searched for the South Beim army as they marched.

That half of the troops… none of them were the forces of feudal nobles. To the lords, not being able to plunder Beim was a problem.

And the Supreme Commander had set the lords' armies on Beim first, meaning they were the ones with the largest casualties.

Soldiers unable to move having lost their lord.

Among the feudal nobles, a system of vassal and vassaler existed. Houses of Baron Class and above held a hierarchical relationship with Baronet and Knight Houses under them. For that sake, in the case where the lord of the vassal state was defeated, their forces would be absorbed into the higher order of power.

But when the vassaler was lost, that couldn't be so.

Bahnseim's army tried to get together, and reorganize the soldiers who had lost their lord. But they weren't able to get on like Centralle's soldiers, where if the commander was defeated, they'd just be assigned to a different unit.

The relations between territories wasn't always favorable. There were cases where the villages they hailed from were in hostile relations. Some whose relatives had been killed… with various

reasons, the reorganization wasn't getting through.

The Supreme Commander received a report from a man under him.

"About the newly reorganized unit, a fight broke out within the unit, and has given out injuries. The situation was one where they were ignoring the orders of the knights we dispatched… saying they wouldn't listen to any orders besides their lords'."

The Supreme Commander's head hurt.

"What sort of situation do they think we're in!? This is why I hate those feudal nobles. Dead or alive, they're nothing but trouble! Say we'll grant troops to the lords who are alive, and lend them out!"

There, his subordinate shook his head.

"T-the thing is… they won't accept any reinforcements that aren't from the main force. The current consensus is that they aren't going to babysit the soldiers of another territory. And there have been some betrayals among the feudal lords, so everyone is on their toes."

By the report, there was a betrayal from a Baron Class Noble House. Because of that, the lords were hesitating to accept troops from other lords. For the vassals that lose their vassalers, were just added together without having to look after one another, the territories themselves and their military drills were different, so they tried to avoid hurriedly fightin alongside one another.

Normally, they'd be moving to gather up as many troops as possible, but after receiving the report from Redant Fortress, the feudal nobles had become shrewd.

And…

"Message! The encampment prepared in Beim was burned to the ground!"

What the runner racing into the tent informed them of, was that the space they had recaptured and set up base at was burned down once more.

“Kuh, so they had planned to invite them in to take us down. What was the commander at the site doing? He should’ve be able to figure something like that out in no time.”

The runner spoke to the Supreme Commander.

“H-however. If he didn’t do it, there would be nowhere to rest within Beim. The commander of the site retreated from the city, and after reorganizing forces, he has proposed to try invasion again.”

Battle within the city was more restricted by buildings than they had anticipated, and open spaces were limited. Therefore, a situation extremely easy for adventurers to fight had formed. Even when surrounded with numbers, with ones unfamiliar with the terrain around them, the adventurers knew how to slip away.

On the contrary, isolated units were being taken out one after another. Of course, Beim’s side wasn’t unscathed. If they continued pushing like this, Bahnseim would come out on top. But in the back, a force of thirty thousand that had defeated their elites was marching on them. Any more damage would mean a drop in the Supreme Commander’s evaluation.

“… Respect the opinion of the one in charge of the site. Retreat, and let them reorganize their forces.”

The Supreme Commander put more of his effort into the reorganization of troops…

❼

… The sixty thousand troops searching out South Beim’s troops dispatched units around from a point a little away from the city of Beim. Many of the mercenaries with a feel for the land were defeated in the invasion of Beim, so they instead used multiple units to search out enemy movements.

If any unit didn’t return, it was thinkable there were enemies there…

“All units have returned right on time. But we were unable to find the

enemy. General, should we proceed straight for South Beim? If we aim for their base of operations, they will have no choice but to come out."

Hearing his subordinate's words, the general with sixty thousand troops assigned to him thought to himself.

"Not even a year has gone by since the start of South Beim's development. If we attack such a place, what are we to do if they simply abandon it? With us out of the way, they'll easily be able to approach the main force."

Thinking of South Beim's development from a time perspective, the general thought it wouldn't be much lost if they cast it away. And protecting the main force's back was his greatest duty.

"All we have to do is protect our force's backs. If an army of thirty thousand is moving, they can't help but be limited in the routes they can take."

An enemy whose arrival they couldn't predict before them, Bahnseim's army continued in a state of high tensions…

❼

… Entering Beim's port one after the next were ships carrying reinforcements.

As the first wave arrived from Galleria's port, Aria came out to greet Lyle. The Vera Trēs that had been on standby in Galleria entered port, so she watched the reinforcements disembark as she waited for Lyle.

Horses and supplies were unloaded one after another, and once Vera stepped down, Aria called over to her.

"Hey, what's up with Lyle? Did something happen?"

To Aria[s worry, Vera's face turned a little red, as she averted her eyes.

“Y-yes. He’s fine, but if I had to say something happened… his timing is, you know… He was dead tired from a few days ago, but when morning came, he suddenly…”

Aria looked at Vera’s face.

“Wait a second. Say it clearly. What exactly happened!? Could it be that at a time like this, he…”

There, Vera spoke in resignation.

“When morning came, he suddenly started laughing loudly. At a time like this? I thought, but we were right on the verge of reaching port. See, we came in a hurry. If possible, I want to let him calm down a bit in the ship, but…”

From the ship, Gracia and Elza disembarked with smiles on their faces. Seeing them head for their subordinates, Aria covered her face with her right hand.

“Why does that guy always do this at the crucial times?”

Right after.

The sound and shake of an explosion rang out, causing Aria to survey the area. She thought it was an offense from Bahnseim, but as the surrounding Valkyries were perfectly calm, she presumed that wasn’t the case, and lowered her guard. And in Aria’s field of vision, she could see the building that had exploded.

Right in the middle of Beim… the Guild building had blown up. As the black smoke rose, the splendid symbol of Beim began to collapse.

When another explosion occurred, Aria sensed Clara standing behind her.

“Ah~, he sure did it, that Lyle-san. He should be flashier with it.”

“Clara!”

Seeing Clara with a different atmosphere than usual, Aria looked at Vera. Vera shrugged shoulders as she spoke.

“She was doing best with taking care of Lyle, and various other

things. And then, you see… she collapsed a few days ago."

This time, seeing Thelma standing beside Clara before she had noticed it, Aria was surprised.

"And why are you here!?"

Thelma touched a hand to her face. Her cheeks were a little red.

"I mean, Lyle-dono collapsed, and I thought they'd need some assistance. Even like this, I was the Holy Maiden, so I've various sorts of medical knowledge in me. I had the relevant Magic Tools as well, so I thought I'd be of some use, you see."

Clara looked at Thelma and laughed.

"This woman was also ridiculously easy. Well, everyone was easy. But if Lyle-san was that aggressive on a regular basis…"

Aria grasped both of Clara's shoulders, violently shaking her back and forth.

"Oy, what happened! Tell me!"

"… Hey, wait! When I'm shaken by your superhuman strength, a frail girl like me can't…"

Monica jumped down from the ship. As Aria looked her way, Monica spoke regretfully.

"What a blunder! To think the chicken dickwad had such a trick up his sleeves… because of you all, I got a late start! Kuh… because he said, 'Oh Beim, the time hath come to fall by my hand,' with a pose like that, I preserved it with such excitement, and yet it had to come to this."

Saying that, Monica raced off. Monica Units One and Two chased after her.

"Like that, you always get in our way!"

"For now, chasing is our top priority!"

Monica's group running off were headed for the exploded Guild

Headquarters. Aria watched over them, as she lightly tapped Clara's dizzy face.

"Hey, just what is he planning? Suddenly blowing up…"

Thelma answered her question.

"Apparently, Beim needs no symbol. From here on, I myself shall be their symbol, or so he said. Lyle-dono truly is heroic."

Aria carefully put Clara to bed on the ground, before giving chase to Monica's unit…

❼

"Faaannntaassticc!!"

I spread out my arms, as I watched the exploding, burning Guild Headquarters, before turning to the heavens, and crying out. Ah, this and that happened, but when I see the Guild Headquarters blow up like this, how refreshing it feels.

The Seventh in the Jewel was overjoyed.

『The performance of gunpowder has increased! What a flashy demolition! But Lyle… no, mr. lyle sure is artistic with his explosions. For it to be blown away so cleanly!』

The Third was also rejoicing.

『It's been a stream of Best Lyle candidates since he woke up on the boat, but to think he'd actually come and blow up the symbol of Beim; how dynamic. Shucks, this time's another splendid harvest. His ability in cutting through the scene of carnage between those three was splendid. He makes battlefields on his own, and resolves them while he's at it… you're perfect, mr. lyle!』

I felt the impact of the blast and crumbling building with my body, as I watched the roof portion fall down to earth. The barrels of gunpowder stuffed in the building were still igniting, or so the vibrations told me.

“Well, it was in the way. To me, and to Beim hereon. This is, in short, the festival to celebrate the birth of a new Beim.”

Smoke rose around as I watched from my box seat. Leaving the symbol of Beim standing was quite inconvenient for me. And when I thought to get rid of it… if I was going to do it anyways, then I might as well make it flashy.

And arriving here with a Skill, Aria shed her sweat as she landed on the roof where I stood. With leftover momentum, she slid, shattering roof tiles on the way.

“I found you!!”

“Oh my, I’ve been found. Aria, good job finding me. This must be love. Oh, wonderful love! Aria, I love you tooooo!! Whoah!”

As Aria approached me, she lifted up my lapels. Her face was mildly reddened, so I’m sure she was hiding her embarrassment. And that part of her was extremely cute.

“What are you doing!? Do you know what period we’re in? The rebuilding was finally going smoothly, and all the preparations were in place!”

I gripped her hands grabbing me, and spoke with a serious expression.

“I’m sorry… I wanted to stand out.”

Aria’s face turned red, so I held her tight.

“Did you think you’d be forgiven for a reason like…”

“Well listen. There weren’t any people in the building. No one around either, and while it was firmly locked, all valuables had been carried off. It seems the merchants and Guild executives seriously do intend to abandon Beim.”

Aria put up light resistance to my embrace, but she didn’t resist seriously.

“T-that’s why we came in first and put up a resistance…”

“Precisely. If the situation changes for the better and we win, they will return. And there’s a possibility Beim will accept them. Even if they don’t, Beim may use this place as the center to go independent regardless of our intentions. For that sake, I need to destroy the symbol of Beim, and plant a new symbol in its people.”

The Third in the Jewel let out his voice.

『Even if they don’t accept the merchants who fled, there’s a possibility they won’t accept Lyle either. I see, so that’s why he destroyed the symbol of the city first.』

The Seventh sounded impressed.

『So he went to break down their hearts. In a hopeless situation, where the preliminary preparations were already completed… well, the rest is all up to Lyle.』

Aria whispered.

“It couldn’t be, so that’s why you…”

I parted a bit to look at Aria’s face, placing my hands on both her shoulders. I directed a smile to her as I spoke.

“Don’t worry. It’s definitely succeed. The reason being… I’m everyone’s Lyle! Oh, it’s right about time the people start gathering.”

Looking around, I could see soldiers racing over alongside Miranda. Climbing the roofs, there were adventurers wary of us as well.

I turned to them.

“Everyone rejoice! Lyle Walt has returned. I’ve come to get rid of whatever desperate situation you may be in, and to reach victory. Now rejoice! Victory is my companion!”

As I waved one hand to appeal around, I received some blank looks.

Aria grabbed me.

“Like hell they can rejoice! Without telling them anything, you’re laughing like a madman at an explosion! Just how much trouble do you think we’ve gone through!?”

The gathering residents of Beim looked at me. They looked up at my existence, and I was in the process of becoming the new symbol of Beim.

“What, you wanted me to praise you? I’ll reward you with a lap pillow later.”

“I-I don’t need one! More importantly, just what did you do to Clara and the others? Their faces were strangely red when they came down from the ship, and they seemed somewhat happy… oy, look me in the eyes when you speak!”

As Aria looked me straight in the eye, I looked deeply into hers. It would be rude for me to lie here.

“You want to know? Then come to my bed tonight. I’ll take my time teaching you.”

Aria’s face went bright red, so I parted from her. And looking over the city of Beim, I looked at Bahnseim’s army beyond. The numbers in Bahnseim’s encampment on the other side of the destroyed wall were terribly low.

I pointed at their army.

“Now, you all shall be the next to fall. Just you wait, gentlemen of Bahnseim. This Lyle Walt… will take you on, up front, fair and square! Fwahahahah!!”

The Seventh sounded delighted.

『Well, if you look at our numbers including Beim, we have the upper hand. Bahnseim has divided its army in two. It’s courtesy to take them on upfront.』

As I raised a laugh, Aria muttered to the side.

“… Fair and square at this point, are you a loony? No, I’m sure you are in this state, but…”

I spoke to Aria.

“That’s not quite right. The wrong one isn’t me, it’s the world! I’m

convinced there's no world in existence that won't recognize a man as cool as me. Yet if they fail to recognize me regardless, I need only make it so they do."

Aria's face cramped up.

"You can properly win, right? It's not just victory, we have quite a few conditions, like increasing our allies and such, right? And yet, you're always like that at the most important times…"

I lifted up my right hand, and looked to the heavens. It was an extremely nice cloudy sky. I got the feeling the heavens were blessing me.

"Fret not. I'm a man loved by the heavens… no, an existence loved by the world. And this Lyle Walt… whether it be women or countries, I'm a man who'll definitely take down whatever I set my sights on. My success rate is one hundred percent! There isn't a million-to-one chance I'll fail. Though the majority of those I'm seducing this time around will be men, mind you!"

From the Jewel, I could hear the Third's laugh.

『So you've finally learned to make tasteful jokes… mr. lyle sure has grown. Though his very existence is already a joke.』

Now, from here on's the real battle. As people continued gathering around, I spread out my arms. Feeling everyone's gaze, I spoke.

"This is the real deal… let's all enjoy it, gentlemen!"

Lyle Walt Stands

After blowing up Guild headquarters, I headed to the plaza. It was filled not only by the alliance and Cartaffs' soldiers cooperating, but by Beim's soldiers and residents as well.

A cloudy sky. Before the people who gathered so early in the morning, I declared.

"Ladies, gentlemen, you've now experienced war first hand. How did that go for you?"

On my riling words, there was some who gained malice alongside the building clamor. I could sense their indicators change from yellow to red with the Sixth's Skill as I continued talking.

"Oh, are you angry? When you were all fighting without the slightest intent to win, I was completely convinced you were just waiting to get trampled down."

Aria and Miranda acting as my guards nearby sent looked at me. I'm sure they were thinking of how unbearable it would be if a riot broke out here. It's true, it would be easy to make an ally of Beim by appealing to safety, justice, and misfortune.

What poor people. No one could have predicted something like this. Next time we'll be there to help you out… wonderful. It was so easy it made me want to laugh.

But that would be troublesome. Currently, my standing was one where I was simply borrowing soldiers… from the Alliance, and Cartaffs, Djanpear and Faunbeux. Especially from the eyes of Zayin and Lorphys of the alliance, alongside the former people of Selva, Beim was nothing but pure villainy.

The peoples' dissatisfactions spread, and they directed hostility at me. How wonderful.

"Coming back at this point! You're too late!"
"give them back! My family… my house… give them back!"
"There are children here whose parents have been killed!"

Hearing the voices of Beim's residents, I scoffed.

"And so? When you've used these means all you wanted to harvest money from foreign lands, this is what you say when you're on the receiving end? What a self-centered lot. I see, so you don't need my help. Then we're leaving. Let Bahnseim trample you down with dignity. I think killing yourselves before you're toyed to death is a valid option. Good grief, when I came to help out, it was all for naught."

When I said that, I heard some incoherent words from the townspeople.

"Y-you're running away!?"
"Coward!
"To hell with hero! You fraud!"

How terrible. Any decent person would be thinking how words weren't getting through to them. But the Third offered some advice from the Jewel.

『Well, that's just how it is. They can't think level-headedly in this sort of situation. They aren't actually thinking rationally about the words coming out of their mouths.』

Atop the temporary stage set up in the plaza, I called Thelma-san over. On the appearance of the former Holy Maiden, the surrounding rabble quieted down a bit.

When I directed her a smile, she nodded. I never intended to bring her along, but this was truly a nice play by me. As I thought, I'm a man who's got it.

Spreading out her arms, Thelma-san addressed the residents of Beim.

“People of Beim. In this war… it truly is a terrible situation. My country of Zayin has heeded Lyle-dono’s words, and dispatched soldiers. Even among the soldiers gathered here today are some hailing from Zayin. But the moment Zayin’s dispatch was decided, many soldiers showed their disapproval. For many years, they were tormented by the mercenaries sent by Beim. To stand a fair chance, we had to pay money to hire them, and by the enemy countries that employed them, our villages were attacked, our families killed, and our lands pillaged. That we sent aide to Beim even so was because of the words of our country’s savior, Lyle-dono.”

I heard some objecting voices from the surrounding residents, but their voices were fewer than when I was up there. The armed soldiers of Zayin glared at Beim’s inhabitants.

“… The reason we came into Beim is because the brains- the merchants and the Guild’s top executives- have fled by ship. If they had not, we wouldn’t have even been able to come running to the city’s aid. The one who called us to action was Lyle-dono.”

As expected, when a beautiful woman was persuading them, there were less objections. Around the time it went quiet, I decided to rotate into my address. Rather than the talk’s contents, I wanted to get a beat in.

“… Listen well. Abandoned gentlemen. Will you drive me out, and be trampled by Bahnseim? Or otherwise… will you follow my words, and hand Beim to me? Give Beim’s everything to me. If you do, I shall grant you all the grace of victory. I will drive Bahnseim out, and breathe life back into Beim. Now choose to me as your king, or prepare for your deaths here! I’ll just say it, but just pushing back Bahnseim once or twice, looking to the country’s national power, it’s more than possible for them to send a force of equal scale again.”

It was possible, but I didn’t say they would do it. At the very least, it would require a few years, but I didn’t have the mind to grant them that time.

“Or will you take back your merchant’s law, and put those that run away at the top? Will you leave defense to adventurers, and lose once more to be trampled? … Let it be known. I shall not abandon

my people. If you're to obey me, then get on your knees!"

As I put in my gestures, Eva activated her Skill【Allmind Language】from behind… it was a certain sort of Skill similar to brainwashing. To Eva who wanted her songs heard, it was a Skill that could be called the strongest. What it called for was a voice to be brought across in a way the listener could understand.

It brushed away the wall of language, among various other things, and made words resound with the heart. To a singer, there wasn't a Skill to be found as convenient as this.

Eva had hesitated to use it, but having the current me's voice delivered was our first priority. Nothing would start if they didn't listen to me.

As always, the shills got on their knees. I had a considerable number of shills mixed in, and as they kneeled one after the next, their number increased. Eventually, only a few hundred were left standing in confusion.

"A-are you lot sane!? Beim is the independent city of merchants! You'll silently let it be played by that brat!?"
"He's a man of the very same Bahnseim that's invading us now!"
"That guy's sister is the Bahnseim's Queen-to-be!"

As I thought, even if I used Skill and shill, there were people who resisted. But a majority had decided to follow me.

I spread out my arms, and wrung out my voice.

"Very well. From this day forth, Beim belongs to me. Gentlemen, this is the tale of a hero. For you shall be following the marvelous me! Fwahahaha!"

Ah, being watched by tens of thousands of people, I raised a loud laugh as I thought.

Of how wonderful it felt.

… The knight leading Bahnseimian soldiers of reorganized unit and changed weaponry stared at the scene before his eyes as he cried out.

“What the hell is this!? Why are you all… this is the opposite, is it not!!?”

The occupied road was of a moderate width.

Thinking field battle equipment would make it difficult to fight in the city, they had abandoned the long spears they had held up to now for their invasion.

As they couldn’t establish movements for too large a force, they were moving in smaller numbers. It was in order to combat adventurers. But what stood before the soldiers of Bahnseim was a fully armored cavalry.

Holding shield and sword, they commenced their attack on the confined street.

The knight fired magic, but it was easily defended against by the Magic Shield deployed by the cavalry. Having a Magic Shield out was a fundamental tactic for cavalry, even in Bahnseim. But they couldn’t believe the scene of Beim actualizing it.

And seeing their assault, from the knight’s eyes, they had to be considerably trained.

“You’re all, soldiers of Beim, and…”

In the confined road… the unit of Bahnseim run down by the cavalry suffered serious damages…

❼

“So they blocked up the smaller roads, and removed the rubble on the major ones. Not bad.”

From atop a building, I watched the charge of the cavalry headed by Aria in admiration.

Surrounded by Monica, Valkyrie Units One and Two, and Three who met up with us, I confirmed the surrounding roof-top situation with Miranda.

In green armor, Miranda removed her helmet, and shrugged her shoulders.

“It’s something Aria thought up. She’s capable when she’s up to it, so I’d have preferred she got up to it sooner.”

She was fed up, but she seemed a bit relieved as well. In other places as well, reinforcements arrived one after the next, and now that the difference in numbers had been filled in, Bahnseim’s superiority was crumbling.

Miranda stroked her hair.

“So what are we going to do next?”

I showed a fearless smile. I’m sure it fit me too well.

“We’ll turn Bahnseim’s army back from the urban areas, and then breach them head-on. This is the important battle of my war declaration against Celes. I can’t think of any other way.”

Miranda let out a sigh.

“Hah… playing fair and square at this point, even if you say head-on… from the enemy’s point of view, they’d definitely object.”

I flipped my hair.

“That isn’t my fault. I went out of my way to circle around to Bahnseim’s front lines. It’s their fault for splitting their forces in two. I’m not at fault.”

The Seventh in the Jewel agreed with me. As expected of my grandfather.

『That’s right. While we devised it to go that way, the ones who handed down the decision were, in the end, Bahnseim’s side. Yes! The ones at fault are Bahnseim’s generals!』

I pulled the Katana hung at my waist. Miranda traced the line of my

eyes. I spoke to our guests.

“So you formed a unit centered around Bahnseim’s remaining elites. It isn’t bad, but because of that, your other units are going to have it rough.”

Before our eyes, were fullplated knights.

We were standing somewhere conspicuous, so they had spotted us. One of the knights spoke.

“The knight in green armor… there’s a blue one there too, but he doesn’t matter. We’ll be the ones to kill you!”

Those were likely Magic Tools. Their equipment was centered on Magic Tools, and they came at us with their specialized weapons. Miranda upt on her helmet, and waved her left hands.

Wires came out of her fingertips. Those sticky threads… failed to capture the knights.

“You think that’s enough!?”

One of the knight’s armors blazed up, burning away the wires as he attacked. Was that the specs of his magic tools, or perhaps a Skill?

“Interesting. Then I’ll…”

When I took a step forward, a knight wielding a large sword attacked from my left. Valkyrie caught the attack with her wing-like binder.

“I won’t let you.”

“This bitch!

Easily taking the attacks of that knight, who boasted both speed and power, Valkyrie Unit One pulled her own sword from her binder. She sent the enemy knight back sliding back, while Units Two and Three took their weapons on hand as well.

Meanwhile, Monica…

“Hmph, looks like there’s no need for me to step in.”

She shook her head as she watched the fighting Valkyries.

Miranda let wires out of the fingertips on both her hands.

“【Wire Frame】… Can you burn through this one?”

Towards the knight who’d burned through her threads, Miranda wound up her wires, and shot a weapon made of them. The dagger pierce through the blazing armor, and Miranda went right into tugging the wire attached to the dagger, slamming the knight at a building.

Everyone was doing their best, so I reluctantly returned the Katana to its scabbard, gripping the Jewel.

“There’s no helping it. I’ll have to announce myself.”

As I changed the Jewel in my left hand to the shape of a bow, unlike before, it’s silver limbs… sprouted ornaments. The portion I gripped had an ornament like the head of a hawk, and it had become a weapon worthy of the hunter, the Second.

Monica looked at it.

“Its shape has changed from the last time.”

“Isn’t it cool?

Saying that, I pulled its string, forming multiple arrows of light. It’s form was different than it had been. As I let the arrows loose on the knights coming at me, the arrows spin as they made their way forth.

“Disperse!”

When the supposed leader said that, the knights began moving separately. Perhaps they had determined the arrows of light to be dangerous, but…

“Too bad. These ones are special.

The pursuing arrows followed the knights without losing momentum. Piercing through them, one of them even blew through a different building.

For the knight who sacrificed his arm to somehow block it, the arrow

of light pierced through, and exploded.

The leader man ran up to me. Perhaps he had a similar Skill to Aria, as he was able to shorten the distance in an instant to lower his sword at me.

“Naïve.”

I swung the bow in my hand. The ornaments on both its limbs were sharp, making it capable of cutting foes. It cut through his armor into his body, and the silver weapon began absorbing his Mana away.

Monica looked at my fighting style.

“Your output’s risen even further. Looks easy to use.”

I leaned the silver bow against my shoulder, looking around.

“Looks like we’re done. Now then, let’s get about collecting their magic tools. I can’t use them, but granting them to the ones who perform well may be nice.”

Miranda looked at me.

“Thinking you’re irrelevant to Magic Tools, you’re quite out of the norm yourself, Lyle.”

I spoke to her.

“Let me tell you something. It’s all about mastering the Skills themselves. Even if you keep a number of Magic Tools on you, there’s no point at all if you can’t master them. And you see… as expected, they still fall short of Skillholders who’ve reached their third stage Skills.”

Right. The strong point of Magic Tools was that they could grant Skills to anyone, but there were very few people capable of using Magic Tools with powerful Skills engraved onto them.

Like a me of times past, it was often the case their weapon would suck away most of their Mana, and render them useless.

“Well, it’s also the case that I’m simply too strong.

There, Miranda removed her helmet, and stared intently at me.

“And we’re weak, you mean to say?”

I looked at Miranda, reverting the silver bow to its Jewel shape, and rehanging it around my neck.

“Don’t be stupid. I became strong because I wanted to protect all of you, didn’t I? Just let it slide as a boy’s bluff of courage. I love you, Miranda.”

Monica and the Valkyries whistled.

“When he opens his mouth, he pledges his love. Good grief, the chicken dickwad’s quite the smooth one. Please say it to me too. I’ll record it in the highest possible resolution and bitrate. I’ll replay it for eternity, while bragging to my younger sisters all the way. Now! Pledge your love to me!”

I wouldn’t mind saying it, but teasing a girl who wanted it was a fun thing to do. I turned to Monica.

“Don’t be foolish, you’re making me blush. You should be able to tell even if I don’t say it. Now let’s return to our jobs.”

Monica spoke.

“I see you’re having fun playing with my feelings! This Monica has already told you she enjoys it this way as well! It’s a reward, please rile me more!”

“You sure are cute. Okay, once this is over, I’ll give you a lap pillow. How about you, Miranda? I had quite a few takers inside the ship.”

Miranda looked a little troubled. And staring at me…

“… I’ll be asking you for it when you get your sanity back.”

I raised a laugh.

“Come anytime. It’s my duty to accept all of your love. My love is great enough to envelop the world!”

Monica and the Valkyries started clapping as I broke into a grand

laugh on the spot.

Wonder Child of the Walt House

… In Bahnseim's marquee, he held his head at the continuous stream of reports coming in.

"Why? Why can't we push through with numbers!?"
"Our foe should number much less than we!"
"Wait, they'll run out of breath soon enough. Here's where we should reorganize the feudal nobles' soldiers, even if we need be a little forceful…"

The reason for their confusion was that Beim had finally put up a unified offense. For battle within the city, no matter how great the adventurers' advantage was, their numbers were different. When they thought they'd be pushing through with numbers, there was no helping that they faced a close fight.

They soon reorganized their forces, switched out their equipment, and attacked again. And yet, the report they received was one of the annihilation of their forces.

"… Could it be they received reinforcements? Just as South Beim received reinforcements from Cartaffs, couldn't Beim have as well?"

On a general's words, the feudal noble Count who was forced to retreat from casualties affirmed. But he seemed considerably irritated.

"Isn't that why I reported it!? You're the ones who ignored it. Don't forget you're the ones who said the alliance would never be able to dispatch much a force!"

The four-nation alliance… it was a gathering of small countries. Their

entire military force may number a few ten thousands, but from Bahnseim's point of view, they weren't a threat or anything. But in their war with Beim, they were a foe whose intervention they didn't welcome.

"As if a mere ten thousand reinforcement could crumble us so! There must be a possibility they're getting reinforcements from elsewhere as well. If Cartaffs got serious, they'd be able to send a hundred thousand…"

The Supreme Commander lowered his clenched fist onto the table.

"Stop your rash remarks. Do you think it's possible for Cartaffs to transport a force of such numbers? It's true, if they used every ship in Beim it would be possible, but Cartaffs is glaring at Bahnseim from the north. They haven't the leisure to dispatch such forces to some foreign land!"

The tent went quiet. They had already investigated the surrounding situation before their invasion. The alliance was overly cold towards Beim. Such so that it wouldn't be strange if a war broke out between them.

Even if they had dealings with Cartafffs, it wasn't thinkable Cartaffs would go that far for them.

"Whatever the case, we cannot stand by and do nothing here…"

"Message! Within Beim, a large-scale force has begun its march! T-they're… planning on attacking this point!"

The generals and lords stationed there… and the Supreme Commander stood. They immediately went into preparations to intercept, but their expressions were well varied.

"So they've gotten impatient and come for us. If it's a field battle, we have the advantage! Make mincemeat of them."

"Why? Why did they come out… why would they discard their advantageous battlefield…"

Each of them had their own impressions as they exited the tent.

There, the unit in front of the gate was breached by Beim's cavalry. Their numbers continued streaming out without any sign of interruption.

But more importantly, the banner they flew was one the generals could not believe.

"Why… why are Cartaffs and the alliance… and even Djanpear taking part!?"

That large banner with blue circle surrounded by a silver crest in the center, was placed in the center of the others…

❼

Atop the wall of Beim, I mounted May, I looked down over the battlefield at the enemy surpassing a hundred thousand before my eyes.

In contrast, our numbers were less than a hundred thousand. Looking at number alone, we faced a minor numerical inferiority. But now that reinforcements had arrived from Djanpear, there was no point in buying any further time.

By my side, a Djanpearan general of tanned skin spoke to me.

"Beim sure is cold. Looks like I'll need to wear something thicker.

I laughed.

It's true it isn't as far south as Djanpear. Now then, it's about time I went out.

It's not like I'd take the front lines and fight. I didn't have such a need.

Gripping the Jewel, I plucked it off its chain to form the halberd in my right hand. It was the one with the lowest Mana consumption, and the most conspicuous weapon.

And as I held up my left hand, the blue Jewel embedded into the weapon let off light.

“I’ve got to make use of it properly one of these days… 【Select】.”

Using the Second’s Skill 【Select】, I was able to designate my attacking allies, and use my own Skills on them. They were too numerous, so I couldn’t use any Skills that were too powerful, but…

“【Full Over】, 【Speed】.”

I used the First’s 【Full Over】, and the Fourth’s 【Speed】 on all allied forces. Even if my Mana pool had grown, when using it on an army of tens of thousands, it consumed a considerable amount. However, the current me was able to bear it.

Standing on the opposite side of me from the Djanpearan general, Novem held up her staff.

“It’s coming. I’ll defend.”

Novem deployed a Magic Shield to defend our allies, and perhaps my Skill had elevated her abilities, as it blocked the enemy’s magic and arrows. Under the umbrella cover of extensive Magic Shield, our allied forces attacked the enemy camp.

Their breaching force was formidable.

“Looks like you’ve got some talented pieces under your control, Lyle-dono. That man called Maksim… even in Djanpear, I’ve heard of him, if but by name alone.”

The one cutting open the lead was Maksim-san. Apart from Aria, and Miranda, the Valkyries were participating as well.

“We’re an allied force, so we can’t help but be unable to choose any complicated military formations. We can do nothing but straight-up attack. I want to raise their coordination a bit more for the real deal… Now I’ll be off.”

Novem spoke to me.

“Lyle-sama, won’t it be fine, even if you don’t go to the front yourself?”

I nodded.

“It’s completely unnecessary. But it’s important to let Bahnseim’s side know about the existence that is me, right? And also… while it’s unnecessary, it’s better the more results we get.”

Lightly tapping her stomach, May raised her forelegs and raced forward. Seeing me race from the top of the wall, the Djanpearan general was a little surprised. Even if he knew quilin could run through the sky, there’s no helping he be surprised.

“Do I just keep going straight?”

“That’s right. If it’s now, our allies are eating into their main force, and there’s no worry of being surrounded!”

“… Lyle, aren’t you a bit petty?”

“Petty? Call it cowardice.”

As I had that conversation with May in the air, May made a straight line towards the enemy headquarters. The Fifth’s and Sixth’s Skills, precisely relayed the affairs of the battlefield to me.

I swung the halberd to cut down the knights guarding the tent. After May blew the top away with magic. The Supreme Commander of Bahnseim’s army was standing before me.

Holding up my halberd on quilin-back, I looked down at the commander.

“I apologize for speaking down from up here. I’m the new ruler of Beim… Lyle Walt. I’ve come to take your heads. Now then… anyone wishing to surrender… I’d think not.”

Once the Generals caught sight of me, they pulled their weapons in indignation. Soldiers gathered around, but our allies were approaching the tent, and it was only a matter of time before they were surrounded.

The Suprme Commander stood, taking a nearby ornamented sword in hand.

“I heard you were Celes-sama’s elder brother, but I see… so you’re the one behind this.”

The surrounding Generals were the same. When they heard my name, they put Celes' name to mouth.

"… So they're under her charm."

As expected. I'm sure the army's mainstay is under her rule as well. And the people in Centralle were naturally those under her influence. I jumped down from May's back, spinning the halberd, and swinging it down on the Supreme Commander.

Bisecting him alongside his ornamented sword, I went right into swinging it at the generals who approached. The surroundings were dyed with blood, and the Halberd sucked in Mana.

The surrounding soldiers stood immobile.

There was that it was a moment's happenings, but the Supreme Commander they were to protect was dead. Confusion began to spread at once.

As I thought over that, with allies in tow, Aria raced to the tent on horseback.

"Hey! Why are you at the front again!?"

Perhaps she had hurriedly forced herself there, as she was out of breath from pushing herself.

"Don't worry. I shan't lose. More importantly… It's time to raise our cry of victory."

I took a deep breath before wringing out my voice.

"The Supreme Commander of Bahnseim's head… has been taken by this Lyle Waaaaallltttt!!"

A soldier hiding behind the pillar of the ruined tent peered out this way, so I threw the halberd. It spun as it cut into the soldier taking aim at me, before returning to my hand.

Aria spread my cry, the surrounding knights and soldiers following along. As they did that, Bahnseimian soldiers began running, surrendering… or attacking resolved for an honorable defeat.

I looked down over Bahnseim's Supreme Commander.

"… Curse your ill fortune of making an enemy of me, is that what I'm supposed to say?"

Dismounting her horse, Aria commanded her subordinates to protect me. And perhaps she had heard my mutterings.

"You're definitely going to regret this."

❼

… Novem watched the overrun force of Bahnseim from atop the wall.

A wind blew, and releasing the hair caught against her face with a finger, her violet eyes focused on the space Lyle was.

"Lyle-sama… you've really grown up."

Holding a Jewel with Skills recorded from the First to Seventh Generation Heads, and capable of handing his ancestors' weapons, the current Lyle was Novem's pride and joy.

To succeed the Walt House, a House with a special meaning to Novem, she saw that he had grown into a worthy young man.

"Standing on his own feet. And that form in battle… Lyle-sama, this Novem is delighted."

With tens of thousands of casualties coming out. While looking at such a battlefield, Novem was smiling…

❼

Night.

In Beim's Adventurers' Guild… it's East Branch, I borrowed a meeting room.

Baldoir reported the present situation to me.

“A few tens of thousands of Bahnseim’s soldiers have fled. I don’t think all the surviving forces will be able to join up again, but at present, I think the area’s bandit numbers will rise to something incredible. Also, Beim’s soldiers we’ve taken in are using violence on Bahnseimian soldiers taken as prisoners of war. The soldiers of the alliance don’t seem to hold too good sentiment toward’s Beim’s side… the scuffles aren’t dying out. Um, Lyle-sama?”

Baldoir looked at me with a troubled look on his face.

“What?”

“… No, um… I’m not quite sure what to think about that appearance. Um, I do understand they’re tired, so if possible, I’d like them to return to their rooms, or rather… I don’t know where I should look.”

Seeing Baldoir’s reddened face, I looked to my sides.

Having gone to the baths to wash off the grime, Aria and Miranda were sitting to my sides in clothing close to undergarments. I sat in the center of the sofa I’d carried over, and there were two women leaning on my lap.

“Aren’t they cute? Want me to introduce you someone to? Ah, I’ve just thought of something. How does the princess of Lorphys sound?”

“Please stop. That’s too far beyond my status. Rather, really, what are you going to do about Lorphys? Within the alliance, Lorphys is the only one that doesn’t have anyone that’ll tie the knot with you, isn’t it?”

“Novem rejected her. Even I can’t force her to be my bride. I can’t go against Novem. And wait, that one’s… yeah, she’s no good.”

“Please don’t try to shove no-good people onto me! … I hope Maksim-dono comes back soon.”

I recalled Maksim-san. Holding his friend’s helmet in one hand, and a bottle of ale in the other, he had locked himself in his room. Adele-san went to cheer him up, but I don’t know what’s happened to the people in question.

Baldoir looked over the report.

“Within the next few days, their surviving forces should regroup, and reorganize. What will you do, Lyle-sama?”

I looked at the two faces leaning on me.

“… I can’t leave Beim yet. There’s a need for me to crush the ones showing restless movements at this stage. Because it’ll be troublesome if they win over the merchants. ”

Baldoir looked mildly impressed upon hearing my opinion.

“I’m a little impressed. I was anxious as you were, but you’’ll do what needs be done. As expected of the Walt House, I guess.”

“I don’t hate pretty words, though. I always hold ideals in my heart. Eventually, I’ll get the continent together, lower war, and aim for world peace!”

“… Um, that’s a bit…”

“You’ve got to dream high! And I’m taking the first step. Do you hate pretty words?”

Baldoir laughed a bit.

“I loved them as a kid. But to be honest, when I became an adult, I was taught just how impossible it was for my ideals to be granted. Do you still believe in them, Lyle-sama?”

I looked at Baldoir’s face.

“Even I know it’s impossible as things are. But in a few hundred years. Or thousands even. I’m taking the first step for what’s to come!”

I don’t think war will go away. But I don’t think it’s a bad thing to wish for peace.

“And also. Don’t I need a goal that grand? I mean, that’s how grand a man I am. And see, such a man has got to do his best for the world.”

Baldoir gave a bitter smile. I heard some voices of contained laughter from the Jewel, but they were much fewer than they had been before.

“A thousand years, is it. I can’t even imagine it.”

The Seventh agreed with Baldoir’s opinion.

『Well, our lives have been spent fighting, from our Founder to Lyle. Even if you talk about peace… It’s true I can only think of strained situations.』

The Third laughed. But it wasn’t a belittling one.

『Peace, eh. Really depends on what state Lyle can call peace. In all actuality, Beim that scattered sparks to its surrounding countries for profit could be called peaceful if you wanted to call it.』

Certainly, but I got the feeling that sort of peace was different.

“If we have that much time to spend, we’ll surely have the world of our ideals.”

As Baldoir said that, I nodded. But looking at Aria and Miranda…

“Well, I’m facing war amongst my harems every day regardless. I need to do something about this situation first. Baldoir, do you have any advice?”

Baldoir looked at me.

“… Why can’t you just let it end on a good note? I don’t have any good ideas. Rather, you have way too many. Exercise a little prudence, please. The former Holy Maiden’s in her thirties, isn’t she?”

Looking at Baldoir, I tilted my head.

“Oy, oy, love is irrelevant to age. And My love in infiiii…!”

As I laughed, my body was grabbed on both sides. It seems Aria and Miranda were awake. Oh, it’s so cute how they get jealous like that. Baldoir covered his face with his left hand.

“For now, I understand that it will be hard to actualize your ideals, Lyle-sama. For starters, work hard to remedy your own surroundings.”

I wonder why it is. Baldoir let out a deep sigh.

Epilogue

… Beim, a room in the Guild's east branch.

In that large, orderly room, Adele Belgi looked at the lines of desks.

There were five lightly-equipped Valkyries stationed. Also present were the guild personnel, and the merchants who didn't run away alongside their men.

In order to fight Bahnseim's remnants, Maksim had marched off, so Adele currently had no allies.

The one to mercilessly thrust that reality at her was Monica.

"The leader of the alliance is about to enter Bahnseim's east, the land that once belonged to a nation neighboring this one. So the management of Beim shall be left to all of you."

Adele looked out the window. Beim in ruins. And the city's residents taking refuge. On top of that, the smaller problems… all of them were being shoved onto them.

Adele raised her hand.

"What is it, Adele-sama?"

Monica's forced addition of the –sama irritated Adele.

"I have a question. With Beim facing such ruin, it's management shall be left to we alone?"

Monica nodded expressionlessly.

"Yes. Affirmative. You've exactly right. For the main force is entering the land east of Bahnseim that… it's a pain, so let's just saying

they’re entering the country formerly known as【Rhuvenns】. There, they’ll likely start into full-blown preparations. Ah, worry not. Maksim-dono will remain behind in Beim.”

Lyle’s force was to enter Rhuvenns under General Blois’ rule, and prepare to counteract Bahnseim from there. That she understood.

But Adele spoke.

“… I-I get the feeling we’re short-staffed over here?”

Monica smiled.

“We’re short-staffed everywhere. Well, we’ve gotten together whoever seems cooperative, so do your best. I’ve high expectations of your municipal abilities, Adele-*sama*.”

As Monica stuck up her thumb and smiled, Adele ruffled up her hair.

“A-at the very least, leave Lianne-san or Novem-san! There’s no way I can manage the city of Beim alone!”

Monica shook her head with a smile. There, she became expressionless again.

“Maintain the status quo. Make revival and Labyrinth management the bare minimum goal. Henceforth, Beim shall be split into South Beim and North Beim… its interests shared. A large portion of the Guild’s rights will be confiscated, so please work hard as proxy leader.”

Taking the Guild’s rights. That was an important thing for Lyle. On top of that, by splitting Beim between north and south, his goal was to chip away at the power merchant’s held as he fostered a greater sense of competition.

The ruined North Beim. The developing- yet still small in scale- South Beim.

It was the birth of twin Beims.

But from Adele’s point of view, hectic work had simply been shoved onto her.

“… Can I refuse?”

Monica remained expressionless.

“Do you think you can? Rest assured. It’s not like everyone’s going to Ruvenns at once. There are various jobs that remain such as adding the prisoners of wars to our forces. But Lianne-*sama* made her way to Ruvenns first.”

While she wasn’t the same type as Adele, if she had to say, Lianne was the type more suited to desk work. While Lyle was away, her ability was abundant enough to act as agent leader of South Beim.

But if that Lianne had already made her way out, Adele was the only one left.

They couldn’t borrow anyone from the alliance. Zayin and Lorphys were busy with their expanded territory, while Galleria and Rusworth had been lacking in domestic affairs staff from the start. Cartaffs and Djanpear would be difficult, and having come to this point, the lack of people capable of working the back lines was become more severe.

Adele hung her head, and offered a word…

“Curse you… Lyle-san.”

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… Where the Trēs House manor once stood was in tatters.

Perhaps some noble had made use of it, as its furniture had been taken, and there were traces of battle left behind. Entering such a manor, Vera and Fidel were surrounded by their subordinates who’d followed them all the way to South Beim.

“… Fidel-sama, there are also areas devastated by fire. This manor is no longer…”

When one of his men muttered disheartened, Fidel gave an, ‘I see,’ as he looked at the manor in nostalgia. Vera could only watch her

father.

There, a knock came to the mansion's broken door, causing everyone to turn. There, with black hair and red eyes… stood a Valkyrie in maid's clothing. Behind her, a slightly-worn Gina and Roland… alongside Fidel's former subordinates who'd driven them him stood looking at the ground.

"Gina…

When Vera caller her name, Gina raised her face.

"Everything was taken. Some ships were caught in the chaos and capsized… the employees betrayed, and took the others. If you want to laugh, then go right ahead! Isn't that why you searched us out!?"

"Gina, stop!"

As Roland held her back, Fidel looked over the two. The subordinates behind them couldn't look Fidel in the eye. Perhaps they were embarrassed.

Vera addressed Gina.

"… I just wanted to see you if you were alive. I'm glad you're safe."

Lyle's goal… the situation encircling Beim, and Bahnseim's declaration of war. In the worst case, Vera thought Gina may have died. But she was relieved to see her alive.

And Fidel was the same. But he spoke.

"How unsightly. When I think of how I was driven away by you all, I can only feel more shameful of myself."

Gina and Roland's bodies twitched. Time continued going by like that, until Gina hung her head.

"… We'll accept any form of punishment. But accept the people who worked for us in South Beim. I beg of you, father."

In regards to her daughter's lowered head, Fidel took a cold attitude.

“Accept them after they drove me out? Your credibility rests at zero. After one betrayal, saying you want to serve under me again is…”

Looking at Fidel’s attitude, Vera covered her face. He really did want to help them. But having only just started up a new business in South Beim, employing any more hands would be difficult.

Simultaneously, South Beim currently held a deep=rooted animosity centered around the belief Beim had thrown them away.

As South Beim was, it was impossible for the driven-out-side accepting merchants of Beim.

“A number of large mercantile ships that had abandoned Beim made their way to South Beim, but we turned them all away. That was South Beim’s answer. Do you understand? South Beim will not accept any of you. That is fact.”

Fidel walked off, everyone following behind him. Vera stopped beside Gina and Roland. Fidel followed suit.

But their subordinates continued walking on.

Fidel spoke.

“… That whelp has a few debts to settle with me. I negotiated to have him let you set up a business in north Beim. I’ll prepare an extent of money. The stolen ships have been secured in South Beim. We’re using them to transport cargo, so come to receive them at the port in three days’ time. That’s all I will do for you. Roland, I leave Gina to you.”

… He said, and walked off. Normally, he’d have wanted to help them, but the surrounding environment, and the feelings of his subordinates. On top of that, the opposing representative merchants of Beim were to be crushed for the sake of Lyle’s plan.

Gina raised her face.

“… Father.”

Vera walked off as well.

“He pushed himself quite a bit. Now do something about it for yourselves.”

Using all Lyle’s debt to him, he had forced him to recognize Gina’s business in north Beim. That was the most he could do…

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The top floor of an inn of Beim.

In that room with a high-class feel, I wrapped a blanket around myself. It was getting dark outside the window, and one day was on the verge of ending. It was a darkness unthinkable of Beim, the city whose streets were once lit at night. The stars looked pretty, but I felt terrible.

“… It’s not my fault.”

From the Jewel, I could hear the Third’s laugh.

『Golly, this time was a huge harvest. To think right after collapsing, you’d take the former Holy Maiden to go, I never even imagined it.』

The Seventh was the same. He gave a similar laugh.

『For me, hearing Lyle’s grand goal of doing good for the world was quite satisfying. No, was that mr. lyle’s goal?』

These guys… they’re having fun teasing me.

I heard a knock. As my body reeled back in shock, I let out a voice.

“Y-yes?

“Pardon my intrusion. Lyle-sama, I’ve come with today’s reports. It’s seems you’ve received various reports form Monica-san, but there are some other specifics as well.”

The one who entered the room was Novem. There was no worry of her teasing me, so I was relieved, but when I recalled how she had seen my post-Growth state as well, it was awkward. I’d shown it to time and time again, but every time only increased the past I wanted

to burry.

“S-sorry. I wanted to be alone for a while… I-I’ll come out tomorrow.”

Novem smiled.

“It would be a big help if you did. Lyle-sama, you’re the leader of the alliance. It’s a huge difference just if you make an appearance or not. And Lianne-san headed for Ruvenns. She did have guards, even if they train up troops there, it will only be to the minimum level. It’s already winter, after all. They shouldn’t be able to move for a while.”

I looked out the window.

“That’s right. It isn’t snowing, but the cold is becoming harsher. We’ll have to reconstruct the surrounding villages, and distribute people a bit.”

There were too many people gathered, that goods expenditure was becoming something extraordinary. Even if we stole back what we could from Bahnseim, the problem was that there was less than expected.

Novem took a seat on the bed.

“According to Lianne-san, she’s going to gather people who endorse you in Ruvenns. For that occasion, she’ll try to shake off as many spies as possible, but perfection will be difficult.”

I’ll do something about that when I make my way there. I have the appropriate Skill for it.”

Novem sounded delighted.

“That would be Fiennes-sama’s Skill, right?”

She said. I was surprised she knew it, but it was Novem after all. It wouldn’t be strange for her to know, and it was natural for the Forxuz House to have documents on the Walt House. There was no use in minding it.

There, Novem’s face turned serious.

“Also, I heard from Baldoir-dono, but I cannot recognize his marriage to the princess of Lorphys. Baldoir-dono is an important retainer who will support you henceforth.”

“… Novem, you’re quite terrible yourself. Aren’t you just saying Lorphys’ princess is plain terrible? Well, they’re too far in status, so I do think it’s impossible.”

As I said that, Novem gave a giggle. I was led along by her into a laugh, and the two of us exchanged some more friendly banter.

❼

… Within the Jewel.

Looking at Novem happily conversing with Lyle, the Third looked a little relieved. There were five silver weapons floating around the round table room, and now it was as quiet as if its once-boisterous atmosphere was a lie.

『I was a bit worried for Lyle, but it looks like it will work out. Perhaps it’s best his mind is focused on mr. lyle right now.』

The Seventh nodded.

『No matter what reasons he has, his feelings of guilt will come out soon. When so many people have been killed, I’m sure he’ll have to take quite a bit upon himself. Well, he’s got Novem and the others with him, so perhaps he’ll be fine? Though that Novem is a bit suspicious.』

The Third touched a hand to his mouth as he smiled.

『Isn’t it fine? It’s a bit heavy, but that’s still love. Now the problem is how Lyle plans on having Novem-chan turn his way in the truest sense.』

The Seventh sounded worried.

『If he could do that, most problems would be settled. Well, the major problem would still remain, thought.』

The major one… it was Celes.

In order to fight Celes, the ancestors were entrusting their knowledge… and their Skills to Lyle. They were preparing for a determined, and certain victory.

If there was to be a problem, it would have to be what came after winning the war. If Celes was able to escape, it would be a problem.

There was no point in surrounding him with people who would end up charmed. In the end, Lyle would have to fight Celes. He was gathering members for that sake, but the ancestors hadn't the slightest clue what his chances of winning were.

And there was a problem they knew.

『The eastern front is wide open. Other countries are marching their lines towards the superpower… you think they'll show up?』

On the Third's question, the Seventh nodded with a serious expression.

『They're coming. The Walt army we trained up will definitely move. At soonest, right when winter breaks. But it all depends on the situation.』

The Third touched a hand to his chin, and looked up at the ceiling.

『Even if a rebellion breaks out within the country, as long as it's small in scale, they'll prioritize Lyle. There are feudal lords in Bahnseim who'll side with him, but… those hostages in Centralle are troublesome.』

And there was something that intrigued the Third even more. He looked at the Seventh.

『Now then, it's about right time I asked. Seventh… no, Brod, do you think you can watch over Lyle's fight with Maizel?』

That the Walt House would move meant Maizel… The Eighth Generation Head of the Walt House would make his move. There was a possibility he would send a representative, but that didn't change the fact they would be fighting the Walt House's army.

『From my point of view, my era's too far removed. To be honest, after we got Baldoir-kun's cooperation, I've barely any lingering attachments. But what about you? There's no guarantee it'll only be traitors like the Virden House.』

The Seventh looked down.

『… Sure enough, it may be something painful to watch. But if the Walt House is going to fall at this rate, it may be best for Lyle to be the one to deliver the finishing blow.』

The Third looked down as well.

『That may be ideal, but I'm emotionally…』

The Seventh looked up at the ceiling.

『… We've finally come all the way here.』

The preparations to fight Celes were reaching their final stage…